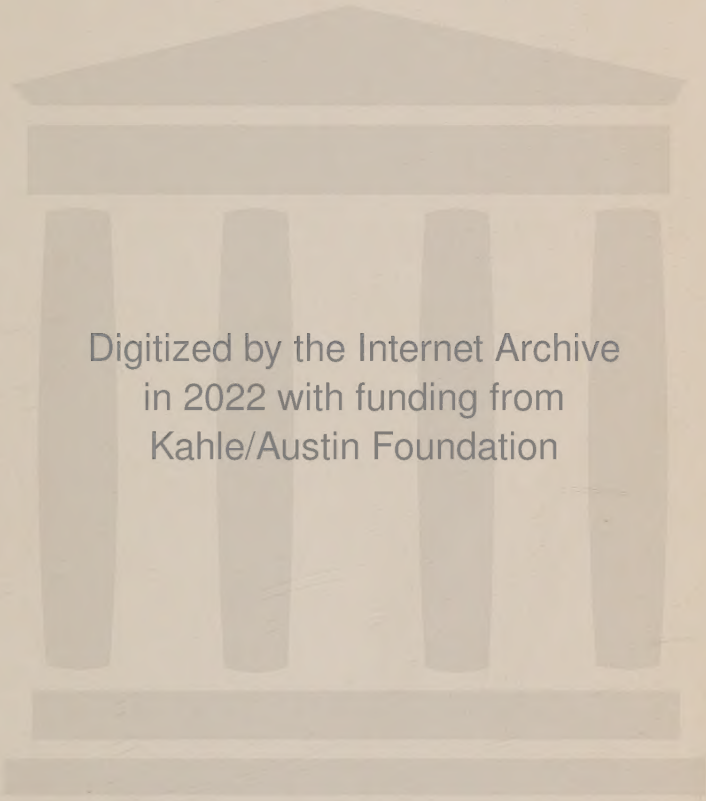


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[See p. 12]

HIS FACE SUFFUSED, HIS EYES GLEAMING, ALONG THE REINS HE SEEMED
TO FLASH HIS WILL

THE CHARIOT-RACE

FROM
B E N - H U R

BY
LEW WALLACE
(1827-1905)

ILLUSTRATED BY
SIGISMOND IVANOWSKI



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ALONG THE REINS HE SEEMED TO FLASH

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The Chariot-race
from Ben-Hur



I

Training for the Race

THE month is July, the year that of our Lord 29, and the place Antioch, then Queen of the East, and, next to Rome, the strongest, if not the most populous, city in the world.

In front of Ben-Hur there was a forest of cypress-trees, each a column tall and straight as a mast. Venturing into the shady precinct, he heard a trumpet gayly blown, and an instant after saw lying upon the grass close by a countryman whom he had run upon in the road going to the temples. The man arose, and came to him.

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"I give you peace again," he said, pleasantly.

"Thank you," Ben-Hur replied; then asked, "Go you my way?"

"I am for the stadium, if that is your way."

"The stadium!"

"Yes. The trumpet you heard but now was a call for the competitors."

"Good friend," said Ben-Hur, frankly, "I admit my ignorance of the Grove; and if you will let me be your follower, I will be glad."

"That will delight me. Hark! I hear the wheels of the chariots. They are taking the track."

Ben-Hur listened a moment, then completed the introduction by laying his hand upon the man's arm, and saying, "I am the son of Arrius, the duumvir; and thou?"

"I am Malluch, a merchant of Antioch."

"Well, good Malluch, the trumpet, and the gride of wheels, and the prospect of diversion excite me. I have some skill in the exercises. In the palæstræ of Rome I am not unknown. Let us to the course."

Malluch lingered to say, quickly, "The

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duumvir was a Roman, yet I see his son in the garments of a Jew."

"The noble Arrius was my father by adoption," Ben-Hur answered.

"Ah! I see, and beg pardon."

Passing through the belt of forest, they came to a field with a track laid out upon it, in shape and extent exactly like those of the stadia. The course, or track proper, was of soft earth, rolled and sprinkled, and on both sides defined by ropes, stretched loosely upon upright javelins. For the accommodation of spectators, and such as had interests reaching forward of the mere practice, there were several stands shaded by substantial awnings, and provided with seats in rising rows. In one of the stands the two new-comers found places.

Ben-Hur counted the chariots as they went by—nine in all.

"I commend the fellows," he said, with good-will. "Here in the East, I thought they aspired to nothing better than the two; but they are ambitious, and play with royal fours. Let us study their performance."

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Eight of the fours passed the stand, some walking, others on the trot, and all unexceptionally handled; then the ninth one came on the gallop. Ben-Hur burst into exclamation.

"I have been in the stables of the emperor, Malluch, but, by our father Abraham of blessed memory! I never saw the like of these."

The last four was then sweeping past. All at once they fell into confusion. Some one on the stand uttered a sharp cry. Ben-Hur turned, and saw an old man half-risen from an upper seat, his hands clenched and raised, his eyes fiercely bright, his long, white beard fairly quivering. Some of the spectators nearest him began to laugh.

"They should respect his beard at least. Who is he?" asked Ben-Hur.

"A mighty man from the Desert, somewhere beyond Moab, and owner of camels in herds, and horses descended, they say, from the racers of the first Pharaoh—Sheik Ilde-rim by name and title."

Thus Malluch replied.

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The driver meanwhile exerted himself to quiet the four, but without avail. Each ineffectual effort excited the sheik the more.

“Abaddon seize him!” yelled the patriarch, shrilly. “Run! fly! do you hear, my children?” The question was to his attendants, apparently of the tribe. “Do you hear? They are Desert-born, like yourselves. Catch them—quick!”

The plunging of the animals increased.

“Accursed Roman!” and the sheik shook his fist at the driver. “Did he not swear he could drive them—swear it by all his brood of bastard Latin gods? Nay, hands off me—off, I say! They should run swift as eagles, and with the temper of hand-bred lambs, he swore. Cursed be he—cursed the mother of liars who calls him son! See them, the priceless! Let him touch one of them with a lash, and—” the rest of the sentence was lost in a furious grinding of his teeth. “To their heads, some of you, and speak them—a word, one is enough, from the tent-song your mothers sang you. Oh, fool, fool that I was to put trust in a Roman!”

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Some of the shrewder of the old man's friends planted themselves between him and the horses. An opportune failure of breath on his part helped the stratagem.

Ben-Hur, thinking he comprehended the sheik, sympathized with him. Far more than mere pride of property—more than anxiety for the result of the race—in his view it was within the possible for the patriarch, according to his habits of thought and his ideas of the inestimable, to love such animals with a tenderness akin to the most sensitive passion.

They were all bright bays, unspotted, perfectly matched, and so proportioned as to seem less than they really were. Delicate ears pointed small heads; the faces were broad and full between the eyes; the nostrils in expansion disclosed membrane so deeply red as to suggest the flashing of flame; the necks were arches, overlaid with fine mane so abundant as to drape the shoulders and breast, while in happy consonance the forelocks were like ravellings of silken veils; between the knees and the fetlocks the legs were flat as an open hand, but above the

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knees they were rounded with mighty muscles needful to upbear the shapely, close-knit bodies; the hoofs were like cups of polished agate; and in rearing and plunging they whipped the air, and sometimes the earth, with tails glossy-black and thick and long. The sheik spoke of them as the priceless, and it was a good saying.

In this second and closer look at the horses, Ben-Hur read the story of their relation to their master. They had grown up under his eyes, objects of his special care in the day, his visions of pride in the night, with his family at home in the black tent out on the shadeless bosom of the desert, as his children beloved. That they might win him a triumph over the haughty and hated Roman, the old man had brought his lovers to the city, never doubting they would win, if only he could find a trusty expert to take them in hand; not merely one with skill, but of a spirit which their spirits would acknowledge. Unlike the colder people of the West, he could not protest the driver's inability, and dismiss him civilly; an Arab and a sheik,

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he had to explode, and rive the air about him with clamor.

Before the patriarch was done with his expletives, a dozen hands were at the bits of the horses, and their quiet assured. About that time, another chariot appeared upon the track; and, unlike the others, driver, vehicle, and racers were precisely as they would be presented in the Circus the day of final trial. For a reason which will presently be more apparent, it is desirable now to give this turnout plainly to the reader.

There should be no difficulty in understanding the carriage known to us all as the chariot of classical renown. One has but to picture to himself a dray with low wheels and broad axle, surmounted by a box open at the tail-end. Such was the primitive pattern. Artistic genius came along in time, and, touching the rude machine, raised it into a thing of beauty—that, for instance, in which Aurora, riding in advance of the dawn, is given to our fancy.

The jockeys of the ancients, quite as shrewd and ambitious as their successors

Training for the Race

of the present, called their humblest turnout a *two*, and their best in grade a *four*; in the latter, they contested the Olympics and the other festal shows founded in imitation of them.

The same sharp gamesters preferred to put their horses to the chariot all abreast; and for distinction they termed the two next the pole *yoke-steeds*, and those on the right and left outside *trace-mates*. It was their judgment, also, that, by allowing the fullest freedom of action, the greatest speed was attainable; accordingly, the harness resorted to was peculiarly simple; in fact, there was nothing of it save a collar round the animal's neck, and a trace fixed to the collar, unless the lines and a halter fall within the term. Wanting to hitch up, the masters pinned a narrow wooden yoke, or cross-tree, near the end of the pole, and, by straps passed through rings at the end of the yoke, buckled the latter to the collar. The traces of the yoke-steeds they hitched to the axle; those of the trace-mates to the top rim of the chariot-bed. There remained, then, but the adjust-

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The Chariot-race

ment of the lines, which, judged by the modern devices, was not the least curious part of the method. For this there was a large ring at the forward extremity of the pole; securing the ends to that ring first, they parted the lines so as to give one to each horse, and proceeded to pass them to the driver, slipping them separately through rings on the inner side of the halters at the mouth.

II

Ben-Hur Sees His Enemy



HE other contestants had been received in silence; the last comer was more fortunate. While moving toward the stand from which we are viewing the scene, his progress was signalized by loud demonstrations, by clapping of hands and cheers, the effect of which was to centre attention upon him exclusively. His yoke-steeds, it was observed, were black, while the trace-mates were snow-white. In conformity to the exacting canons of Roman taste, they had all four been mutilated; that is to say, their tails had been clipped, and, to complete the barbarity, their shorn manes were divided into knots tied with flaring red-and-yellow ribbons.

The Chariot-race

In advancing, the stranger at length reached a point where the chariot came into view from the stand, and its appearance would of itself have justified the shouting. The wheels were very marvels of construction. Stout bands of burnished bronze reinforced the hubs, otherwise very light; the spokes were sections of ivory tusks, set in with the natural curve outward to perfect the dishing, considered important then as now; bronze tires held the felloes, which were of shining ebony. The axle, in keeping with the wheels, was tipped with heads of snarling tigers done in brass, and the bed was woven of willow wands gilded with gold.

The coming of the beautiful horses and resplendent chariot drew Ben-Hur to look at the driver with increased interest.

Who was he?

When Ben-Hur asked himself the question first, he could not see the man's face, or even his full figure; yet the air and manner were familiar, and pricked him keenly with a reminder of a period long gone.

Who could it be?

Ben-Hur Sees His Enemy

Nearer now, and the horses approaching at a trot. From the shouting and the gorgeousness of the turnout, it was thought he might be some official favorite or famous prince. Such an appearance was not inconsistent with exalted rank. Kings often struggled for the crown of leaves which was the prize of victory. Nero and Commodus, it will be remembered, devoted themselves to the chariot. Ben-Hur arose and forced a passage down nearly to the railing in front of the lower seat of the stand. His face was earnest, his manner eager.

And directly the whole person of the driver was in view. A companion rode with him, in classic description a Myrtilus, permitted men of high estate indulging their passion for the race-course. Ben-Hur could see only the driver, standing erect in the chariot, with the reins passed several times round his body—a handsome figure, scantily covered by a tunic of light-red cloth; in the right hand a whip; in the other, the arm raised and lightly extended, the four lines. The pose was exceedingly graceful and animated.

The Chariot-race

The cheers and clapping of hands were received with statuesque indifference. Ben-Hur stood transfixed—his instinct and memory had served him faithfully — *the driver was Messala.*

By the selection of horses, the magnificence of the chariot, the attitude, and display of person—above all, by the expression of the cold, sharp, eagle features, imperialized in his countrymen by sway of the world through so many generations—Ben-Hur knew Messala unchanged, as haughty, confident, and audacious as ever, the same in ambition, cynicism, and mocking *insouciance.*

As Ben-Hur descended the steps of the stand, an Arab arose upon the last one at the foot, and cried out:

“Men of the East and West—hearken! The good Sheik Ilderim giveth greeting. With four horses, sons of the favorites of Solomon the Wise, he hath come up against the best. Needs he most a mighty man to drive them. Whoso will take them to his satisfaction, to him he promiseth enrichment forever. Here—there—in the city and in

Ben-Hur Sees His Enemy

the Circuses, and wherever the strong most do congregate, tell ye this his offer. So saith my master, Sheik Ilderim the Generous."

The proclamation awakened a great buzz among the people under the awning. By night it would be repeated and discussed in all the sporting circles of Antioch. Ben-Hur, hearing it, stopped and looked hesitatingly from the herald to the sheik. Malluch thought he was about to accept the offer, but was relieved when he presently turned to him, and asked: "Good Malluch, where to now?"

Malluch kept watch on his companion as they went on, and saw that for the moment at least his good spirits were out. To the people passing he gave no attention; over the wonders they came upon there were no exclamations; silently, even sullenly, he kept a slow pace.

The truth was, the sight of Messala had set Ben-Hur to thinking. It seemed scarce an hour ago that the strong hands had torn him from his mother, scarce an hour ago that the Roman had put seal upon the gates of

The Chariot-race

his father's house. He recounted how, in the hopeless misery of the life—if such it might be called—in the galleys, he had had little else to do, aside from labor, than dream dreams of vengeance, in all of which Messala was the principal. There might be, he used to say to himself, escape for Gratus, but for Messala — never! And to strengthen and harden his resolution, he was accustomed to repeat over and over, Who pointed us out to the persecutors? And when I begged him for help—not for myself—who mocked me, and went away laughing? And always the dream had the same ending. The day I meet him, help me, thou good God of my people!—help me to some fitting special vengeance!

And now the meeting was at hand.

Perhaps, if he had found Messala poor and suffering, Ben-Hur's feeling had been different; but it was not so. He found him more than prosperous; in the prosperity there was a dash and glitter—gleam of sun on gilt of gold.

So it happened that what Malluch account-

Ben-Hur Sees His Enemy

ed a passing loss of spirit was pondering when the meeting should be, and in what manner he could make it most memorable.

"Good Malluch," said Ben-Hur, stopping, "may a man forget his mother?"

The question was abrupt and without direction, and therefore of the kind which leaves the person addressed in a state of confusion. Malluch looked into Ben-Hur's face for a hint of meaning, but saw, instead, two bright-red spots, one on each cheek, and in his eyes traces of what might have been repressed tears; then he answered, mechanically, "No!" adding, with fervor, "never"; and a moment after, when he began to recover himself, "if he is an Israelite, never!" And when at length he was completely recovered: "My first lesson in the synagogue was the Shema; my next was the saying of the son of Sirach, 'Honor thy father with thy whole soul, and forget not the sorrows of thy mother.'"

The red spots on Ben-Hur's face deepened.

"The words bring my childhood back

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again; and, Malluch, they prove you a genuine Jew. I believe I can trust you."

Ben-Hur let go the arm he was holding, and caught the folds of the gown covering his own breast, and pressed them close, as if to smother a pain or a feeling there as sharp as a pain.

"My father," he said, "bore a good name, and was not without honor in Jerusalem, where he dwelt. My mother, at his death, was in the prime of womanhood; and it is not enough to say of her she was good and beautiful: in her tongue was the law of kindness, and her works were the praise of all in the gates, and she smiled at days to come. I had a little sister, and she and I were the family, and we were so happy that I, at least, have never seen harm in the saying of the old rabbi: 'God could not be everywhere, and, therefore, he made mothers.' One day an accident happened to a Roman in authority as he was riding past our house at the head of a cohort; the legionaries burst the gate and rushed in and seized us. I have not seen my mother or sister since. I cannot say

Ben-Hur Sees His Enemy

they are dead or living. I do not know what became of them. But, Malluch, the man in the chariot yonder was present at the separation; he gave us over to the captors; he heard my mother's prayer for her children, and he laughed when they dragged her away. Hardly may one say which graves deepest in memory, love or hate. To-day I knew him afar—and, Malluch—"

He caught the listener's arm again.

"And, Malluch, he knows and takes with him now the secret I would give my life for: he could tell if she lives, and where she is, and her condition; if she—no, *they*—much sorrow has made the two as one—if they are dead, he could tell where they died, and of what, and where their bones await my finding."

"And will he not?"

"No."

"Why?"

"I am a Jew, and he is a Roman."

"But Romans have tongues, and Jews, though ever so despised, have methods to beguile them."

"For such as he? No; and, besides, the

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secret is one of state. All my father's property was confiscated and divided."

Malluch nodded his head slowly, much as to admit the argument; then he asked anew: "Did he not recognize you?"

"He could not. I was sent to death in life, and have been long since accounted of the dead."

"I wonder you did not strike him," said Malluch, yielding to a touch of passion.

"That would have been to put him past serving me forever. I would have had to kill him, and Death, you know, keeps secrets better even than a guilty Roman."

The man who, with so much to avenge, could so calmly put such an opportunity aside must be confident of his future or have ready some better design, and Malluch's interest changed with the thought. Ben-Hur was actually asserting a claim upon him for his own sake. In other words, Malluch was preparing to serve him with good heart and from downright admiration.

After brief pause, Ben-Hur resumed speaking.

Ben-Hur Sees His Enemy

"I would not take his life, good Malluch; against that extreme the possession of the secret is for the present, at least, his safeguard; yet I may punish him, and so you give me help, I will try."

"He is a Roman," said Malluch, without hesitation; "and I am of the tribe of Judah. I will help you. If you choose, put me under oath—under the most solemn oath."

"Give me your hand, that will suffice."

As their hands fell apart, Ben-Hur said, with lightened feeling: "That I would charge you with is not difficult, good friend; neither is it dreadful to conscience. Let us move on."

III

The Plan of Ben-Hur



HEY took a road which led to the right across the meadow. Ben-Hur was the first to break the silence.

"Do you know Sheik Il-derim the Generous?"

"Yes."

"Where is his Orchard of Palms? or, rather, Malluch, how far is it beyond the village of Daphne?"

Malluch replied: "The Orchard of Palms lies beyond the village two hours by horse, and one by a swift camel."

"Thank you; and to your knowledge once more. Have the games of which you told me been widely published? and when will they take place?"

The questions were suggestive; and if they

The Plan of Ben-Hur

did not restore Malluch his confidence, they at least stimulated his curiosity.

“Oh yes, they will be of ample splendor. The prefect is rich, and could afford to lose his place; yet, as is the way with successful men, his love of riches is nowise diminished, and to gain a friend at court, if nothing more, he must make ado for the Consul Maxentius, who is coming hither to make final preparations for a campaign against the Parthians. The money there is in the preparations the citizens of Antioch know from experience; so they have had permission to join the prefect in the honors intended for the great man. A month ago heralds went to the four quarters to proclaim the opening of the Circus for the celebration. The name of the prefect would be of itself good guarantee of variety and magnificence, particularly throughout the East; but when to his promises Antioch joins hers, all the islands and the cities by the sea stand assured of the extraordinary, and will be here in person or by their most famous professionals. The fees offered are royal.”

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"And the Circus—I have heard it is second only to the Maximus."

"At Rome, you mean. Well, ours seats two hundred thousand people, yours seats seventy-five thousand more; yours is of marble, so is ours; in arrangement they are exactly the same."

"Are the rules the same?"

Malluch smiled.

"If Antioch dared be original, son of Arius, Rome would not be the mistress she is. The laws of the Circus Maximus govern except in one particular: there but four chariots may start at once, here all start without reference to number."

"That is the practice of the Greeks," said Ben-Hur.

"Yes, Antioch is more Greek than Roman."

"So then, Malluch, I may choose my own chariot?"

"Your own chariot and horses. There is no restriction upon either."

While replying, Malluch observed the thoughtful look on Ben-Hur's face give place to one of satisfaction.

The Plan of Ben-Hur

"One thing more now, O Malluch. When will the celebration be?"

"Ah! your pardon," the other answered. "To-morrow—and the next day," he said, counting aloud; "then, to speak in the Roman style, if the sea-gods be propitious, the consul arrives. Yes, the sixth day from this we have the games."

"The time is short, Malluch, but it is enough." The last words were spoken decisively. "By the prophets of our old Israel! I will take to the reins again. Stay! a condition: is there assurance that Messala will be a competitor?"

Malluch saw now the plan, and all its opportunities for the humiliation of the Roman; and he had not been true descendant of Jacob if, with all his interest awakened, he had not rushed to a consideration of the chances. His voice actually trembled as he said: "Have you the practice?"

"Fear not, my friend. The winners in the Circus Maximus have held their crowns these three years at my will. Ask them—ask the best of them—and they will tell you

The Chariot-race

so. In the last great games the emperor himself offered me his patronage if I would take his horses in hand and run them against the entries of the world."

"But you did not?"

Malluch spoke eagerly.

"I — I am a Jew" — Ben-Hur seemed shrinking within himself as he spoke—"and, though I wear a Roman name, I dared not do professionally a thing to sully my father's name in the cloisters and courts of the Temple. In the palæstræ I could indulge practice which, if followed into the Circus, would become an abomination; and if I take to the course here, Malluch, I swear it will not be for the prize or the winner's fee."

"Hold—swear not so!" cried Malluch. "The fee is ten thousand sestertii—a fortune for life!"

"Not for me, though the prefect trebled it fifty times. Better than that, better than all the imperial revenues from the first year of the first Cæsar—I will make this race to humble my enemy. Vengeance is permitted by the law."

The Plan of Ben-Hur

Malluch smiled and nodded as if saying: "Right, right—trust me a Jew to understand a Jew."

"The Messala will drive," he said, directly. "He is committed to the race in many ways—by publication in the streets, and in the baths and theatres, the palace and barracks; and, to fix him past retreat, his name is on the tablets of every young spendthrift in Antioch."

"In wager, Malluch?"

"Yes, in wager; and every day he comes ostentatiously to practise, as you saw him."

"Ah! and that is the chariot, and those the horses, with which he will make the race? Thank you, thank you, Malluch! You have served me well already. I am satisfied. Now be my guide to the Orchard of Palms, and give me introduction to Sheik Ilderim the Generous."

"When?"

"To-day. His horses may be engaged to-morrow."

"You like them, then?"

Ben-Hur answered with animation:

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"I saw them from the stand an instant only, for Messala then drove up, and I might not look at anything else; yet I recognized them as of the blood which is the wonder as well as the glory of the deserts. I never saw the kind before, except in the stables of Cæsar; but once seen, they are always to be known. To-morrow, upon meeting, I will know you, Malluch, though you do not so much as salute me; I will know you by your face, by your form, by your manner; and by the same signs I will know them, and with the same certainty. If all that is said of them be true, and I can bring their spirit under control of mine, I can—"

"Win the sestertii!" said Malluch, laughing.

"No," answered Ben Hur, as quickly. "I will do what better becomes a man born to the heritage of Jacob—I will humble mine enemy in a most public place. But," he added, impatiently, "we are losing time. How can we most quickly reach the tents of the sheik?"

Malluch took a moment for reflection.

The Plan of Ben-Hur

"It is best we go straight to the village, which is fortunately near by; if two swift camels are to be had for hire there, we will be on the road but an hour."

"Let us about it, then."

The village was an assemblage of palaces in beautiful gardens, interspersed with khans of princely sort. Dromedaries were happily secured, and upon them the journey to the famous Orchard of Palms was begun.

"Hark!" said Malluch, presently. "Some one comes overtaking us."

The noise grew louder, until presently they heard the rumble of wheels mixed with the beating of horse-hoofs. A moment later Sheik Ilderim himself appeared on horse-back followed by a train, among which were the four wine-red Arabs drawing the chariot. The sheik's chin, in its muffling of long white beard, was drooped upon his breast. Our friends had out-travelled him; but at sight of them he raised his head and spoke kindly:

"Peace to you!—Ah, my friend Malluch! Welcome! And tell me you are not going, but just come. Ay, take up the straps, both

The Chariot-race

of you, and follow me. I have bread and leben, or, if you prefer it, arrack, and the flesh of young kid. Come!"

They followed after him to the door of the tent, in which, when they were dismounted, he stood to receive them, holding a platter with three cups filled with creamy liquor just drawn from a great, smoke-stained skin bottle, pendent from the central post.

"Drink," he said, heartily — "drink, for this is the fear-naught of the tentmen."

They each took a cup, and drank till but the foam remained.

"Enter now, in God's name."

And when they were gone in, Malluch took the sheik aside, and spoke to him privately; after which he went to Ben-Hur and excused himself.

"I have told the sheik about you, and he will give you the trial of his horses in the morning. He is your friend. Having done for you all I can, you must do the rest, and let me return to Antioch. There is one there who has my promise to meet him to-night.

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I have no choice but to go. I will come back to-morrow prepared, if all goes well in the mean time, to stay with you until the games are over."

With blessings given and received, Malluch set out in return.

IV

The Foals of the Pure Blood



ERVANTS were already waiting the sheik's direction. One of them took off his sandals; another unlatched Ben-Hur's Roman shoes; then the two exchanged their dusty outer garments for fresh ones of white linen.

"Enter—in God's name, enter, and take thy rest," said the host, heartily, in the dialect of the Market-place of Jerusalem; forthwith he led the way to the divan.

"I will sit here," he said next, pointing; "and there the stranger."

A woman—in the old time she would have been called a handmaid—answered, and dexterously piled the pillows and bolsters as rests for the back; after which they sat upon the side of the divan, while water was brought

The foals of the Pure Blood

fresh from the lake, and their feet bathed and dried with napkins.

"We have a saying in the Desert," Ilderim began, gathering his beard, and combing it with his slender fingers, "that a good appetite is the promise of a long life. Hast thou such?"

"By that rule, good sheik, I will live a hundred years. I am a hungry wolf at thy door," Ben-Hur replied.

"Well, thou shalt not be sent away like a wolf. I will give thee the best of the flocks."

Ilderim clapped his hands.

"Seek the stranger in the guest-tent, and say I, Ilderim, send him a prayer that his peace may be as incessant as the flowing of waters."

The man in waiting bowed.

"Say, also," Ilderim continued, "that I have returned with another for breaking of bread; and, if Balthasar the wise careth to share the loaf, three may partake of it, and the portion of the birds be none the less."

The second servant went away.

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"Let us take our rest now."

Thereupon Ilderim settled himself upon the divan, as at this day merchants sit on their rugs in the bazaars of Damascus; and when fairly at rest, he stopped combing his beard, and said, gravely: "That thou art my guest, and hast drunk my leben, and art about to taste my salt, ought not to forbid a question: Who art thou?"

"Sheik Ilderim," said Ben-Hur, calmly enduring his gaze, "I pray thee not to think me trifling with thy just demand; but was there never a time in thy life when to answer such a question would have been a crime to thyself?"

"By the splendor of Solomon, yes!" Ilderim answered. "Betrayal of self is at times as base as the betrayal of a tribe."

"Thanks, thanks, good sheik!" Ben-Hur exclaimed. "Never answer became thee better. Now I know thou dost but seek assurance to justify the trust I have come to ask, and that such assurance is of more interest to thee than the affairs of my poor life."

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The sheik in his turn bowed, and Ben-Hur hastened to pursue his advantage.

"So it please thee then," he said, "first, I am not a Roman, as the name given thee as mine implieth."

Ilderim clasped the beard overflowing his breast, and gazed at the speaker with eyes faintly twinkling through the shade of the heavy, close-drawn brows.

"In the next place," Ben-Hur continued, "I am an Israelite of the tribe of Judah."

The sheik raised his brows a little.

"Nor that merely. Sheik, I am a Jew with a grievance against Rome compared with which thine is not more than a child's trouble."

The old man combed his beard with nervous haste, and let fall his brows until even the twinkle of the eyes went out.

"Still further: I swear to thee, Sheik Ilderim—I swear by the covenant the Lord made with my fathers—so thou but give me the revenge I seek, the money and the glory of the race shall be thine."

Ilderim's brows relaxed; his head arose;

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his face began to beam; and it was almost possible to see the satisfaction taking possession of him.

“Enough!” he said. “If at the roots of thy tongue there is a lie in coil, Solomon himself had not been safe against thee. That thou art not a Roman—that as a Jew thou hast a grievance against Rome, and revenge to compass, I believe; and on that score enough. But as to thy skill. What experience hast thou in racing with chariots? And the horses—canst thou make them creatures of thy will?—to know thee? to come at call? to go, if thou sayest it, to the last extreme of breath and strength? and then, in the perishing moment, out of the depths of thy life thrill them to one exertion the mightiest of all? The gift, my son, is not to every one. Ah, by the splendor of God! I knew a king who governed millions of men, their perfect master, but could not win the respect of a horse. Mark! I speak not of the dull brutes whose round it is to slave for slaves—the debased in blood and image—the dead in spirit; but of such as mine here

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—the kings of their kind; of a lineage reaching back to the broods of the first Pharaoh; my comrades and friends, dwellers in tents, whom long association with me has brought up to my plane; who to their instincts have added our wits and to their senses joined our souls, until they feel all we know of ambition, love, hate, and contempt; in war, heroes; in trust, faithful as women. Ho, there!”

A servant came forward.

“Let my Arabs come!”

The man drew aside part of the division curtain of the tent, exposing to view a group of horses, which lingered a moment where they were as if to make certain of the invitation.

“Come!” Ilderim said to them. “Why stand ye there? What have I that is not yours? Come, I say!”

They stalked slowly in.

“Son of Israel,” the master said, “thy Moses was a mighty man, but—ha, ha, ha! —I must laugh when I think of his allowing thy fathers the plodding ox and the dull, slow-natured ass, and forbidding them

The Chariot-race

property in horses. Ha, ha, ha! Think—est thou he would have done so had he seen that one—and that—and this?” At the word he laid his hand upon the face of the first to reach him, and patted it with infinite pride and tenderness.

“It is a misjudgment, sheik, a misjudgment,” Ben-Hur said, warmly. “Moses was a warrior as well as a lawgiver beloved by God; and to follow war—ah, what is it but to love all its creatures—these among the rest?”

A head of exquisite turn—with large eyes, soft as a deer’s, and half hidden by the dense forelock, and small ears, sharp-pointed and sloped well forward — approached then quite to his breast, the nostrils open, and the upper lip in motion. “Who are you?” it asked, plainly as ever man spoke. Ben-Hur recognized one of the four racers he had seen on the course, and gave his open hand to the beautiful brute.

“They will tell you, the blasphemers!—may their days shorten as they grow fewer!” —the sheik spoke with the feeling of a man

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repelling a personal defamation—"they will tell you, I say, that our horses of the best blood are derived from the Nesæan pastures of Persia. God gave the first Arab a measureless waste of sand, with some treeless mountains, and here and there a well of bitter waters, and said to him: 'Behold thy country!' And when the poor man complained, the Mighty One pitied him, and said again: 'Be of cheer! for I will twice bless thee above other men.' The Arab heard, and gave thanks, and with faith set out to find the blessings. He travelled all the boundaries first, and failed; then he made a path into the Desert, and went on and on—and in the heart of the waste there was an island of green very beautiful to see; and in the heart of the island, lo! a herd of camels, and another of horses! He took them joyfully, and kept them with care for what they were—best gifts of God. And from that green isle went forth all the horses of the earth; even to the pastures of Nesæa they went; and northward to the dreadful vales perpetually

The Chariot-race

threshed by blasts from the Sea of Chill Winds. Doubt not the story; or if thou dost, may never amulet have charm for an Arab again. Nay, I will give thee proof."

He clapped his hands.

"Bring me the records of the tribe," he said to the servant who responded.

While waiting, the sheik played with the horses, patting their cheeks, combing their forelocks with his fingers, giving each one a token of remembrance. Presently six men appeared with chests of cedar reinforced by bands of brass, and hinged and bolted with brass.

"Nay," said Ilderim, when they were all set down by the divan, "I meant not all of them; only the records of the horses—that one. Open it and take back the others."

The chest was opened, disclosing a mass of ivory tablets strung on rings of silver wire; and as the tablets were scarcely thicker than wafers, each ring held several hundreds of them.

"I know," said Ilderim, taking some of

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the rings in his hand—"I know with what care and zeal, my son, the scribes of the Temple in the Holy City keep the names of the newly born, that every son of Israel may trace his line of ancestry to its beginning, though it antedate the patriarchs. My fathers—may the recollection of them be green forever!—did not think it sinful to borrow the idea, and apply it to their dumb servants. See these tablets!"

Ben-Hur took the rings, and separating the tablets saw they bore rude hieroglyphs in Arabic, burned on the smooth surface by a sharp point of heated metal.

"Canst thou read them, O son of Israel?"

"No. Thou must tell me their meaning."

"Know thou, then, each tablet records the name of a foal of the pure blood born to my fathers through the hundreds of years passed; and also the names of sire and dam. Take them, and note their age, that thou mayst the more readily believe."

Some of the tablets were nearly worn away. All were yellow with age.

"In the chest there, I can tell thee now,

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I have the perfect history; perfect because certified as history seldom is—showing of what stock all these are sprung—this one, and that now supplicating thy notice and caress; and as they come to us here, their sires, even the furthest removed in time, came to my sires, under a tent-roof like this of mine, to eat their measure of barley from the open hand, and be talked to as children; and as children kiss the thanks they have not speech to express. And now, O son of Israel, thou mayst believe my declaration—if I am a lord of the Desert, behold my ministers! Take them from me, and I become as a sick man left by the caravan to die. Thanks to them, age hath not diminished the terror of me on the highways between cities; and it will not while I have strength to go with them. Ha, ha, ha! I could tell thee marvels done by their ancestors. In a favoring time I may do so; for the present, enough that they were never overtaken in retreat; nor, by the sword of Solomon, did they ever fail in pursuit! That, mark you, on the

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sands and under saddle; but now—I do not know—I am afraid, for they are under yoke the first time, and the conditions of success are so many. They have the pride and the speed and the endurance. If I find them a master, they will win. Son of Israel! so thou art the man, I swear it shall be a happy day that brought thee thither. Of thyself now speak.”

“I know now,” said Ben-Hur, “why it is that in the love of an Arab his horse is next to his children; and I know, also, why the Arab horses are the best in the world; but, good sheik, I would not have you judge me by words alone; for, as you know, all promises of men sometimes fail. Give me the trial first on some plain hereabout, and put the four in my hand to-morrow.”

Ilderim’s face beamed again, and he would have spoken.

“A moment, good sheik, a moment!” said Ben-Hur. “Let me say further. From the masters in Rome I learned many lessons, little thinking they would serve me

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in a time like this. I tell thee these thy sons of the Desert, though they have separately the speed of eagles and the endurance of lions, will fail if they are not trained to run together under the yoke. For bethink thee, sheik, in every four there is one the slowest and one the swiftest; and while the race is always to the slowest, the trouble is always with the swiftest. It was so to-day; the driver could not reduce the best to harmonious action with the poorest. My trial may have no better result; but if so, I will tell thee of it: that I swear. Wherefore, in the same spirit I say, can I get them to run together, moved by my will, the four as one, thou shalt have the sestertii and the crown, and I my revenge. What sayest thou?"

Ilderim listened, combing his beard the while. At the end he said, with a laugh: "I think better of thee, son of Israel. We have a saying in the Desert, 'If you will cook the meal with words, I will promise an ocean of butter.' Thou shalt have the horses in the morning."

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At that moment there was a stir at the rear entrance to the tent.

"The supper—it is here! And yonder my friend Balthasar, whom thou shalt know."


And to the servants he added:

"Take the records away, and return my jewels to their apartment."

And they did as he ordered.

V

Ben-Hur Tries the Horses

T was yet the early morning hour when Ben-Hur entered Ilderim's tent. He had taken a plunge into the lake, and breakfasted, and appeared now in an under-tunic, sleeveless, and with skirt scarcely reaching to the knee.

The sheik saluted him from the divan.

"I give thee peace, son of Arrius," he said, with admiration, for, in truth, he had never seen a more perfect illustration of glowing, powerful, confident manhood. "I give thee peace and good-will. The horses are ready; I am ready. And thou?"

"The peace thou givest me, good sheik, I give thee in return. I thank thee for so much good-will. I am ready."



BEN-HUR TRIES THE HORSES

Ben-Hur Tries the Horses

Ilderim clapped his hands.

"I will have the horses brought. Be seated."

"Are they yoked?"

"No."

"Then suffer me to serve myself," said Ben-Hur. "It is needful that I make the acquaintance of thy Arabs. I must know them by name, O sheik, that I may speak to them singly; nor less must I know their temper, for they are like men; if bold, the better of scolding; if timid, the better of praise and flattery. Let the servants bring me the harness."

"And the chariot?" asked the sheik.

"I will let the chariot alone to-day. In its place, let them bring me a fifth horse, if thou hast it; he should be barebacked, and fleet as the others."

Ilderim's wonder was aroused, and he summoned a servant immediately.

"Bid them bring the harness for the four," he said—"the harness for the four, and the bridle for Sirius."

Ilderim then arose.

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"Sirius is my love, and I am his, O son of Arrius. We have been comrades for twenty years — in tent, in battle, in all stages of the Desert we have been comrades. I will show him to you."

Going to the division curtain, he held it while Ben-Hur passed under. The horses came to him in a body. One with a small head, luminous eyes, neck like the segment of a bended bow, and mighty chest, curtailed thickly by a profusion of mane soft and wavy as a damsel's locks, nickered low and gladly at sight of him.

"Good horse," said the sheik, patting the dark-brown cheek. "Good horse, good-morning." Turning then to Ben-Hur, he added: "This is Sirius, father of the four here. Mira, the mother, awaits our return, being too precious to be hazarded in a region where there is a stronger hand than mine. And much I doubt"—he laughed as he spoke—"much I doubt, O son of Arrius, if the tribe could endure her absence. She is their glory; they worship her; did she gallop over them, they would laugh. Ten

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thousand horsemen, sons of the Desert, will ask to-day, 'Have you heard of Mira?' And to the answer, 'She is well,' they will say, 'God is good! blessed be God!'"

"Mira—Sirius—names of stars, are they not, O sheik?" asked Ben-Hur, going to each of the four, and to the sire, offering his hand.

"And why not?" replied Ilderim. "Wert thou ever abroad on the Desert at night?"

"No."

"Then thou canst not know how much we Arabs depend upon the stars. We borrow their names in gratitude, and give them in love. My fathers all had their Miras, as I have mine; and these children are stars no less. There, see thou, is Rigel, and there Antares; that one is Atair, and he whom thou goest to now is Aldebaran, the youngest of the brood, but none the worse of that—no, not he! Against the wind he will carry thee till it roar in thy ears like Akaba; and he will go where thou sayest, son of Arrius—ay, by the glory of Solomon! he will take thee to the lion's jaws, if thou darest so much."

The Chariot-race

The harness was brought. With his own hands Ben-Hur equipped the horses; with his own hands he led them out of the tent, and there attached the reins.

"Bring me Sirius," he said.

An Arab could not have better sprung to seat on the courser's back.

"And now the reins."

They were given him, and carefully separated.

"Good sheik," he said, "I am ready. Let a guide go before me to the field, and send some of thy men with water."

There was no trouble at starting. The horses were not afraid. Already there seemed a tacit understanding between them and the new driver, who had performed his part calmly, and with the confidence which always begets confidence. The order of going was precisely that of driving, except that Ben-Hur sat upon Sirius instead of standing in the chariot. Ilderim's spirit arose. He combed his beard, and smiled with satisfaction as he muttered: "He is not a Roman, no, by the splendor of God!"

Ben-Hur Tries the Horses

He followed on foot, the entire tenantry of the dower — men, women, and children — pouring after him, participants all in his solicitude, if not in his confidence.

The field, when reached, proved ample and well fitted for the training, which Ben-Hur began immediately by driving the four at first slowly, and in perpendicular lines, and then in wide circles. Advancing a step in the course, he put them next into a trot; again progressing, he pushed into a gallop; at length he contracted the circles, and yet later drove eccentrically here and there, right, left, forward, and without a break. An hour was thus occupied. Slowing the gait to a walk, he drove up to Ilderim.

“The work is done, nothing now but practice,” he said. “I give you joy, Sheik Ilderim, that you have such servants as these. See,” he continued, dismounting and going to the horses — “see, the gloss of their red coats is without spot; they breathe lightly as when I began. I give thee great joy, and it will go hard if” — he turned his flashing eyes upon the old man’s

The Chariot-race

face—"if we have not the victory and our—"

Ilderim picked up his broken sentence:

"The victory, and our revenge!" Then he said, aloud: "I am not afraid; I am glad. Son of Arrius, thou art the man. Be the end like the beginning, and thou shalt see of what stuff is the lining of the hand of an Arab who is able to give."

"I thank thee, good sheik," Ben-Hur returned, modestly. "Let the servants bring drink for the horses."

With his own hands he gave the water.

Remounting Sirius, he renewed the training, going as before from walk to trot, from trot to gallop; finally, he pushed the steady racers into the run, gradually quickening it to full speed. The performance then became exciting; and there were applause for the dainty handling of the reins, and admiration for the four, which were the same, whether they flew forward or wheeled in varying curvature. In their action there were unity, power, grace, pleasure, all without effort or sign of labor. The admiration

Ben-Hur Tries the Horses

was unmixed with pity or reproach, which would have been as well bestowed upon swallows in their evening flight.

The exercises in the field continued but a little longer—in all about two hours. At their conclusion, Ben-Hur brought the four to a walk, and drove to Ilderim.

“With leave, O sheik,” he said, “I will return thy Arabs to the tent, and bring them out again this afternoon.”

Ilderim walked to him as he sat on Sirius, and said: “I give them to you, son of Arrius, to do with as you will until after the games. You have done with them in two hours what the Roman — may jackals gnaw his bones fleshless! — could not in as many weeks. We will win—by the splendor of God, we will win!”

At the tent Ben-Hur remained with the horses while they were being cared for; then, after a plunge in the lake and a cup of arrack with the sheik, whose flow of spirits was royally exuberant, he dressed himself in his Jewish garb again, and walked with Malluch, who had come to the ground, on into the Orchard.

The Chariot-race

There was much conversation between the two, not all of it important. One part, however, must not be overlooked. Ben-Hur was speaking.

"I will give you," he said, "an order for my property stored in the khan this side the river by the Seleucian Bridge. Bring it to me to-day, if you can. And, good Malluch—if I do not overtask you—"

Malluch protested heartily his willingness to be of service.

"Thank you, Malluch, thank you," said Ben-Hur. "I will take you at your word, remembering that we are brethren of the old tribe, and that the enemy is a Roman. First, then—as you are a man of business, which I much fear Sheik Ilderim is not—"

"Arabs seldom are," said Malluch, gravely.

"Nay, I do not impeach their shrewdness, Malluch. It is well, however, to look after them. To save all forfeit or hindrance in connection with the race, you would put me perfectly at rest by going to the office of the Circus, and seeing that he has complied with every preliminary rule; and if you can get

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a copy of the rules, the service may be of great avail to me. I would like to know the colors I am to wear, and particularly the number of the crypt I am to occupy at the starting; if it be next Messala's on the right or left, it is well; if not, and you can have it changed so as to bring me next the Roman, do so. Have you good memory, Malluch?"

"It has failed me, but never, son of Arrius, where the heart helped it as now."

"I will venture, then, to charge you with one further service. I saw yesterday that Messala was proud of his chariot, as he might be, for the best of Cæsar's scarcely surpass it. Can you not make its display an excuse which will enable you to find if it be light or heavy? I would like to have its exact weight and measurements—and, Malluch, though you fail in all else, bring me exactly the height his axle stands above the ground. You understand, Malluch? I do not wish him to have any actual advantage of me. I do not care for his splendor; if I beat him, it will make his fall the harder, and my triumph the more complete.

The Chariot-race

If there are advantages really important, I want them."

"I see, I see!" said Malluch. "A line dropped from the centre of the axle is what you want."

"Thou hast it; and be glad, Malluch—it is the last of my commissions. Let us return to the dower."

At the door of the tent they found a servant replenishing the smoke-stained bottles of leben freshly made, and stopped to refresh themselves. Shortly afterward Malluch returned to the city.

Ilderim returned to the dower next day about the third hour.

"Where is the young Jew?" he asked.

"In the field with the horses," a servant replied.

The sheik remounted his horse. That moment a stranger made his appearance, coming, apparently, from the city.

"I am looking for Sheik Ilderim, surnamed the Generous," the stranger said.

His language and attire bespoke him a Roman.

Ben-Hur Tries the Horses

What he could not read, he yet could speak; so the old Arab answered, with dignity: "I am Sheik Ilderim."

The man's eyes fell; he raised them again, and said, with forced composure: "I heard you had need of a driver for the games."

Ilderim's lip under the white mustache curled contemptuously.

"Go thy way," he said. "I have a driver."

He turned to ride away, but the man, lingering, spoke again.

"Sheik, I am a lover of horses, and they say you have the most beautiful in the world."

The old man was touched; he drew rein, as if on the point of yielding to the flattery, but finally replied: "Not to-day, not to-day; some other time I will show them to you. I am too busy just now."

He rode to the field, while the stranger betook himself to town again with a smiling countenance. He had accomplished his mission.

And every day thereafter, down to the

The Chariot-race

great day of the games, a man—sometimes two or three men—came to the sheik at the Orchard, pretending to seek an engagement as driver.

In such manner Messala kept watch over Ben-Hur.

The sheik waited, well satisfied, until Ben-Hur drew his horses off the field for the forenoon—well satisfied, for he had seen them, after being put through all the other paces, run full speed in such manner that it did not seem there were one the slowest and another the fastest—run, in other words, as if the four were one.

“This afternoon, O sheik, I will give Sirius back to you.” Ben-Hur patted the neck of the old horse as he spoke. “I will give him back, and take to the chariot.”

“So soon?” Ilderim asked.

“With such as these, good sheik, one day suffices. They are not afraid; they have a man’s intelligence, and they love the exercise. This one”—he shook a rein over the back of the youngest of the four—“you called him Aldebaran, I believe—is the swift-

Ben-Hur Tries the Horses

est; in once round a stadium he would lead the others thrice his length."

Ilderim pulled his beard, and said, with twinkling eyes: "Aldebaran is the swiftest; but what of the slowest?"

"This is he." Ben-Hur shook the rein over Antares. "This is he: but he will win, for, look you, sheik, he will run his utmost all day—all day; and, as the sun goes down, he will reach his swiftest."

"Right again," said Ilderim.

"I have but one fear, O sheik."

The sheik became doubly serious.

"In his greed of triumph, a Roman cannot keep honor pure. In the games—all of them, mark you—their tricks are infinite; in chariot-racing their knavery extends to everything—from horse to driver, from driver to master. Wherefore, good sheik, look well to all thou hast; from this till the trial is over, let no stranger so much as see the horses. Would you be perfectly safe, do more—keep watch over them with armed hand as well as sleepless eye; then I will have no fear of the end."

The Chariot-race

At the door of the tent they dismounted.

“What you say shall be attended to. By the splendor of God, no hand shall come near them except it belong to one of the faithful! To-night I will set watches.”

The mid-day meal disposed of, still further to occupy himself, Ben-Hur had the chariot rolled out into the sunlight for inspection. The word but poorly conveys the careful study the vehicle underwent. No point or part of it escaped him. With a pleasure which will be better understood hereafter, he saw the pattern was Greek—in his judgment preferable to the Roman in many respects; it was wider between the wheels, and lower and stronger, and the disadvantage of greater weight would be more than compensated by the greater endurance of his Arabs. Speaking generally, the carriage-makers of Rome built for the games almost solely, sacrificing safety to beauty, and durability to grace; while the chariots of Achilles and “the king of men,” designed for war and all its extreme tests, still ruled the tastes

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of those who met and struggled for the crowns Isthmian and Olympic.

Next he brought the horses, and, hitching them to the chariot, drove to the field of exercise, where, hour after hour, he practised them in movement under the yoke. When he came away in the evening it was with restored spirit, and a fixed purpose to defer action in the matter of Messala until the race was won or lost. He could not forego the pleasure of meeting his adversary under the eyes of the East; that there might be other competitors seemed not to enter his thought. His confidence in the result was absolute; no doubt of his own skill; and as to the four, they were his full partners in the glorious game.

"Let him look to it, let him look to it! Ha, Antares—Aldebaran! Shall he not, O honest Rigel? And thou, Atair, king among coursers, shall he not beware of us? Ha, ha! good hearts!"

So in rests he passed from horse to horse, speaking, not as a master, but the senior of as many brethren.

VI

Ben-Hur, a Jew, Driver



THE day before the games, in the afternoon, all Ilderim's racing property was taken to the city and put in quarters adjoining the Circus. Along with it the good man carried a great deal of property not of that class; so with servants, retainers mounted and armed, horses in leading, cattle driven, camels laden with baggage, his outgoing from the Orchard was not unlike a tribal migration. The people along the road failed not to laugh at his motley procession; on the other side, it was observed that, with all his irascibility, he was not in the least offended by their rudeness. If he was under surveillance, as he had reason to believe, the informer would describe the semi-barbarous

Ben-Hur, a Jew, Driver

show with which he came up to the races. The Romans would laugh; the city would be amused; but what cared he? Next morning the pageant would be far on the road to the Desert, and going with it would be every movable thing of value belonging to the Orchard—everything save such as were essential to the success of his four. He was, in fact, started home; his tents were all folded; the dowar was no more; in twelve hours all would be out of reach, pursue who might. A man is never safer than when he is under the laugh; and the shrewd old Arab knew it.

Neither he nor Ben-Hur overestimated the influence of Messala; it was their opinion, however, that he would not begin active measures against them until after the meeting in the Circus; if defeated there, especially if defeated by Ben-Hur, they might instantly look for the worst he could do. With this view, they shaped their course, and were prepared to betake themselves out of harm's way. They rode together now in good spirits, calmly confident of success on the morrow.

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On the way they came upon Malluch, in waiting for them. The faithful fellow gave no sign by which it was possible to infer any knowledge on his part of the relationship so recently admitted between Ben-Hur and Simonides [a wealthy merchant and the steward of Ben-Hur's father], or of the treaty between them and Ilderim. He exchanged salutations as usual, and produced a paper, saying to the sheik: "I have here the notice of the editor of the games, just issued, in which you will find your horses published for the race. You will find in it also the order of exercises. Without waiting, good sheik, I congratulate you upon your victory."

He gave the paper over, and, leaving the worthy to master it, turned to Ben-Hur.

"To you, also, son of Arrius, my congratulations. There is nothing now to prevent your meeting Messala. Every condition preliminary to the race is complied with. I have the assurance from the editor himself."

"I thank you, Malluch," said Ben-Hur.

Ben-Hur, a Jew, Driver

Malluch proceeded:

"Your color is white, and Messala's mixed scarlet and gold. The good effects of the choice are visible already. Boys are now hawking white ribbons along the streets; to-morrow every Arab and Jew in the city will wear them. In the Circus you will see the white fairly divide the galleries with the red."

"The galleries—but not the tribunal over the Porta Pompæ."

"No; the scarlet and gold will rule there. But if we win"—Malluch chuckled with the pleasure of the thought—"if we win, how the dignitaries will tremble! They will bet, of course, according to their scorn of everything not Roman—two, three, five to one on Messala, because he is Roman." Dropping his voice yet lower, he added: "It ill becomes a Jew of good standing in the Temple to put his money at such a hazard; yet, in confidence, I will have a friend next behind the consul's seat to accept offers of three to one, or five, or ten—the madness may go to such height. I have put to his order six thousand shekels for the purpose."

The Chariot-race

"Nay, Malluch," said Ben-Hur, "a Roman will wager only in his Roman coin. Suppose you find your friend to-night, and place to his order sestertii in such amount as you choose. And look you, Malluch—let him be instructed to seek wagers with Messala and his supporters; Ilderim's four against Messala's."

Malluch reflected a moment.

"The effect will be to centre interest upon your contest."

"The very thing I seek, Malluch."

"I see, I see."

"Ay, Malluch; would you serve me perfectly, help me to fix the public eye upon our race—Messala's and mine."

Malluch spoke quickly: "It can be done."

"Then let it be done," said Ben-Hur.

"Enormous wagers offered will answer; if the offers are accepted, all the better."

Malluch turned his eyes watchfully upon Ben-Hur.

"Shall I not have back the equivalent of his robbery?" said Ben-Hur, partly to himself. "Another opportunity may not come.

Ben-Hur, a Jew, Driver

And if I could break him in fortune as well as in pride! Our father Jacob could take no offence."

A look of determined will knit his handsome face, giving emphasis to his further speech.

"Yes, it shall be. Hark, Malluch! Stop not in thy offer of sestertii. Advance them to talents, if any there be who dare so high. Five, ten, twenty talents; ay, fifty, so the wager be with Messala himself."

"It is a mighty sum," said Malluch. "I must have security."

"So thou shalt. Go to Simonides, and tell him I wish the matter arranged. Tell him my heart is set on the ruin of my enemy, and that the opportunity hath such excellent promise that I choose such hazards. On our side be the God of our fathers. Go, good Malluch. Let this not slip."

And Malluch, greatly delighted, gave him parting salutation, and started to ride away, but returned presently.

"Your pardon," he said to Ben-Hur. "There was another matter. I could not

The Chariot-race

get near Messala's chariot myself, but I had another measure it; and, from his report, its hub stands quite a palm higher from the ground than yours."

"A palm! So much?" cried Ben-Hur, joyfully.

Then he leaned over to Malluch.

"As thou art a son of Judah, Malluch, and faithful to thy kin, get thee a seat in the gallery over the Gate of Triumph, down close to the balcony in front of the pillars, and watch well when we make the turns there; watch well, for if I have favor at all, I will—Nay, Malluch, let it go unsaid! Only get thee there, and watch well."

At that moment a cry burst from Ilderim.

"Ha! By the splendor of God! what is this?"

He drew near Ben-Hur with a finger pointing on the face of the notice.

"Read," said Ben-Hur.

"No; better thou."

Ben-Hur took the paper, which, signed by the prefect of the province as editor, performed the office of a modern programme,

Ben-Hur, a Jew, Driver

giving particularly the several divertissements provided for the occasion. It informed the public that there would be first a procession of extraordinary splendor; that the procession would be succeeded by the customary honors to the god Consus, whereupon the games would begin — running, leaping, wrestling, boxing, each in the order stated. The names of the competitors were given, with their several nationalities and schools of training, the trials in which they had been engaged, the prizes won, and the prizes now offered; under the latter head the sums of money were stated in illuminated letters, telling of the departure of the day when the simple chaplet of pine or laurel was fully enough for the victor, hungering for glory as something better than riches, and content with it.

Over these parts of the programme Ben-Hur sped with rapid eyes. At last he came to the announcement of the race. He read it slowly. Attending lovers of the heroic sports were assured they would certainly be gratified by an Orestean struggle-unparalleled

The Chariot-race

in Antioch. The city offered the spectacle in honor of the consul. One hundred thousand sesterii and a crown of laurel were the prizes. Then followed the particulars. The entries were six in all—fours only permitted; and, to further interest in the performance, the competitors would be turned into the course together. Each four then received description.

“I. A four of Lysippus the Corinthian—two grays, a bay, and a black; entered at Alexandria last year, and again at Corinth, where they were winners. Lysippus, driver. Color, yellow.

“II. A four of Messala of Rome—two white, two black; victors of the Circensian as exhibited in the Circus Maximus last year. Messala, driver. Colors, scarlet and gold.

“III. A four of Cleanthes the Athenian—three gray, one bay; winners at the Isthmian last year. Cleanthes, driver. Color, green.

“IV. A four of Dicæus the Byzantine—two black, one gray, one bay; winners this year at Byzantium. Dicæus, driver. Color, black.

“V. A four of Admetus the Sidonian—all grays. Thrice entered at Cæsarea, and thrice victors. Admetus, driver. Color, blue.

“VI. A four of Ilderim, sheik of the Desert. All bays; first race. Ben-Hur, a Jew, driver. Color, white.”

Ben-Hur, a Jew, Driver

Ben-Hur, a Jew, driver!

Why that name instead of Arrius?

Ben-Hur raised his eyes to Ilderim. He
had found the cause of the Arab's outcry.
Both rushed to the same conclusion.

The hand was the hand of Messala!

VII

Messala, Six to One



VENING was hardly come upon Antioch, when the Omphalus, nearly in the centre of the city, became a troubled fountain from which in every direction, but chiefly down to the Nymphæum and east and west along the Colonnade of Herod, flowed currents of people, for the time given up to Bacchus and Apollo.

For such indulgence anything more fitting cannot be imagined than the great roofed streets, which were literally miles on miles of porticos wrought of marble, polished to the last degree of finish, and all gifts to the voluptuous city by princes careless of expenditure where, as in this instance, they thought they were eternizing themselves.

Messala, Sir to One

Darkness was not permitted anywhere; and the singing, the laughter, the shouting, were incessant, and in compound like the roar of waters dashing through hollow grotts, confused by a multitude of echoes.

The many nationalities represented, though they might have amazed a stranger, were not peculiar to Antioch. Of the various missions of the great empire, one seems to have been the fusion of men and the introduction of strangers to each other; accordingly, whole peoples rose up and went at pleasure, taking with them their costumes, customs, speech, and gods; and where they chose, they stopped, engaged in business, built houses, erected altars, and were what they had been at home.

There was a peculiarity, however, which could not have failed the notice of a looker-on this night in Antioch. Nearly everybody wore the colors of one or other of the charioteers announced for the morrow's race. Sometimes it was in form of a scarf, sometimes a badge; often a ribbon or a feather. Whatever the form, it signified merely the

The Chariot-race

wearer's partiality; thus, green published a friend of Cleanthes the Athenian, and black an adherent of the Byzantine. This was according to a custom, old probably as the day of the race of Orestes—a custom, by-the-way, worthy of study as a marvel of history, illustrative of the absurd yet appalling extremities to which men frequently suffer their follies to drag them.

The observer abroad on this occasion, once attracted to the wearing of colors, would have very shortly decided that there were three in predominance—green, white, and the mixed scarlet and gold.

But let us from the streets to the palace on the island.

The five great chandeliers in the saloon are freshly lighted. The divan has its corps of sleepers and burden of garments, and the tables yet resound with the rattle and clash of dice. Yet the greater part of the company are not doing anything. They walk about, or yawn tremendously, or pause as they pass each other to exchange idle nothings. Will the weather be fair to-morrow?

Messala, Sir to One

Are the preparations for the games complete? Do the laws of the Circus in Antioch differ from the laws of the Circus in Rome? Truth is, the young fellows are suffering from *ennui*. Their heavy work is done; that is, we would find their tablets, could we look at them, covered with memoranda of wagers—wagers on every contest; on the running, the wrestling, the boxing; on everything but the chariot-race.

And why not on that?

Good reader, they cannot find anybody who will hazard so much as a denarius with them against Messala.

There are no colors in the saloon but his.

No one thinks of his defeat.

Why, they say, is he not perfect in his training? Did he not graduate from an imperial *lanista*? Were not his horses winners at the Circensian in the Circus Maximus? And then—ah, yes! he is a Roman!

In a corner, at ease on the divan, Messala himself may be seen. Around him, sitting or standing, are his courtierly admirers, ply-

The Chariot-race

ing him with questions. There is, of course, but one topic.

Enter Drusus and Cecilius.

"Ah!" cries the young prince, throwing himself on the divan at Messala's feet—"ah! by Bacchus, I am tired!"

"Whither away?" asks Messala.

"Up the street; up to the Omphalus, and beyond—who shall say how far? Rivers of people; never so many in the city before. They say we will see the whole world at the Circus to-morrow."

Messala laughed scornfully.

"The idiots! *Perpol!* They never beheld a Circensian with Cæsar for editor. But, my Drusus, what found you?"

"Nothing."

"O—ah! You forget," said Cecilius.

"What?" asked Drusus.

"The procession of whites."

"*Mirabile!*" cried Drusus, half rising. "We met a faction of whites, and they had a banner. But—ha, ha, ha!"

He fell back indolently.

"Cruel Drusus—not to go on," said Messala.

Messala, Sir to One

"Scum of the Desert were they, my Messala, and garbage-eaters from the Jacob's Temple in Jerusalem. What had I to do with them?"

"Nay," said Cecilius, "Drusus is afraid of a laugh, but I am not, my Messala."

"Speak thou, then."

"Well, we stopped the faction, and—"

"Offered them a wager," said Drusus, relenting, and taking the word from the shadow's mouth. "And—ha, ha, ha!—one fellow with not enough skin on his face to make a worm for a carp stepped forth, and—ha, ha, ha!—said yes. I drew my tablets. 'Who is your man?' I asked. 'Ben-Hur, the Jew,' said he. Then I: 'What shall it be? How much?' He answered, 'A—a—' Excuse me, Messala. By Jove's thunder, I cannot go on for laughter! Ha, ha, ha!"

The listeners leaned forward.

Messala looked to Cecilius.

"A shekel," said the latter.

"A shekel! A shekel!"

A burst of scornful laughter ran fast upon the repetition.

The Chariot-race

"And what did Drusus?" asked Messala.

An outcry over about the door just then occasioned a rush to that quarter; and, as the noise there continued and grew louder, even Cecilius betook himself off, pausing only to say: "The noble Drusus, my Messala, put up his tablets and—lost the shekel."

"A white! A white!"

"Let him come!"

"This way, this way!"

These and like exclamations filled the saloon, to the stoppage of other speech. The dice-players quit their games; the sleepers awoke, rubbed their eyes, drew their tablets, and hurried to the common centre.

"I offer you—"

"And I—"

"I—"

The person so warmly received was a respectable Jew, Ben-Hur's fellow-voyager from Cyprus. He entered grave, quiet, observant. His robe was spotlessly white; so was the cloth of his turban. Bowing and smiling at the welcome, he moved slowly toward the central table. Arrived there, he

Messala, Sir to One

drew his robe about him in a stately manner, took seat, and waved his hand. The gleam of a jewel on a finger helped him not a little to the silence which ensued.

"Romans—most noble Romans—I salute you!" he said.

"Easy, by Jupiter! Who is he?" asked Drusus.

"A dog of Israel—Sanballat by name—purveyor for the army; residence, Rome; vastly rich; grown so as a contractor of furnishings which he never furnishes. He spins mischiefs, nevertheless, finer than spiders spin their webs. Come—by the girdle of Venus! let us catch him!"

Messala arose as he spoke, and, with Drusus, joined the mass crowded about the purveyor.

"It came to me on the street," said that person, producing his tablets, and opening them on the table with an impressive air of business, "that there was great discomfort in the palace because offers on Messala were going without takers. The gods, you know, must have sacrifices; and here am I. You

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see my color; let us to the matter. Odds first, amounts next. What will you give me?"

The audacity seemed to stun his hearers.

"Haste!" he said. "I have an engagement with the consul."

The spur was effective.

"Two to one!" cried half a dozen in a voice.

"What!" exclaimed the purveyor, astonished. "Only two to one, and yours a Roman!"

"Take three, then."

"Three say you—only three—and mine but a dog of a Jew! Give me four."

"Four it is," said a boy, stung by the taunt.

"Five—give me five!" cried the purveyor, instantly.

A profound stillness fell on the assemblage.

"The consul—your master and mine—is waiting for me."

The inaction became awkward to the many.

"Give me five—for the honor of Rome, five!"

Messala, Sir to One

"Five let it be," said one in answer.

There was a sharp cheer—a commotion—and Messala himself appeared.

"Five let it be," he said.

And Sanballat smiled, and made ready to write.

"If Cæsar die to-morrow," he said, "Rome will not be all bereft. There is at least one other with spirit to take his place. Give me six."

"Six be it," answered Messala.

There was another shout louder than the first.

"Six be it," repeated Messala. "Six to one—the difference between a Roman and a Jew. And, having found it, now, O rede-mptor of the flesh of swine, let us on. The amount—and quickly. The consul may send for thee, and I will then be bereft."

Sanballat took the laugh against him coolly, and wrote, and offered the writing to Messala.

"Read, read!" everybody demanded.

And Messala read:

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“Mem.—Chariot-race. Messala of Rome, in wager with Sanballat, also of Rome, says he will beat Ben-Hur, the Jew. Amount of wager, twenty talents. Odds to Sanballat, six to one.

“Witnesses:

SANBALLAT.”

There was no noise, no motion. Each person seemed held in the pose the reading found him. Messala stared at the memorandum, while the eyes which had him in view opened wide and stared at him. He felt the gaze, and thought rapidly. So lately he stood in the same place, and in the same way hectored the countrymen around him. They would remember it. If he refused to sign, his heroship was lost. And sign he could not; he was not worth one hundred talents, nor the fifth part of the sum. Suddenly his mind became a blank; he stood speechless; the color fled his face. An idea at last came to his relief.

“Thou Jew!” he said, “where hast thou twenty talents? Show me.”

Sanballat’s provoking smile deepened.

“There,” he replied, offering Messala a paper.

Messala, Six to One

"Read, read!" arose all around.

Again Messala read:

"At ANTIOCH, *Tammuz 16th day.*

"The bearer, Sanballat of Rome, hath now to his order with me fifty talents, coin of Cæsar.

"SIMONIDES."

"Fifty talents, fifty talents!" echoed the throng, in amazement.

Then Drusus came to the rescue.

"By Hercules!" he shouted, "the paper lies, and the Jew is a liar. Who but Cæsar hath fifty talents at order? Down with the insolent white!"

The cry was angry, and it was angrily repeated; yet Sanballat kept his seat, and his smile grew more exasperating the longer he waited. At length Messala spoke.

"Hush! One to one, my countrymen—one to one, for love of our ancient Roman name."

The timely action recovered him his ascendancy.

"O thou circumcised dog!" he continued, to Sanballat, "I gave thee six to one, did I not?"

"Yes," said the Jew, quietly.

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"Well, give me now the fixing of the amount."

"With reserve, if the amount be trifling, have thy will," answered Sanballat.

"Write, then, five in place of twenty."

"Hast thou so much?"

"By the mother of the gods, I will show you receipts."

"Nay, the word of so brave a Roman must pass. Only make the sum even—six make it, and I will write."

"Write it so."

And forthwith they exchanged writings.

Sanballat immediately arose and looked around him, a sneer in place of his smile. No man better than he knew those with whom he was dealing.

"Romans," he said, "another wager, if you dare! Five talents against five talents that the white will win. I challenge you collectively."

They were again surprised.

"What!" he cried, louder. "Shall it be said in the Circus to-morrow that a dog of Israel went into the saloon of the palace full



MESSALA, SIX TO ONE

Messala, Sir to One

of Roman nobles—among them the scion of a Cæsar—and laid five talents before them in challenge, and they had not the courage to take it up?”

The sting was unendurable.

“Have done, O insolent!” said Drusus, “write the challenge, and leave it on the table; and to-morrow, if we find thou hast indeed so much money to put at such hopeless hazard, I, Drusus, promise it shall be taken.”

Sanballat wrote again, and, rising, said, unmoved as ever: “See, Drusus, I leave the offer with you. When it is signed, send it to me any time before the race begins. I will be found with the consul in a seat over the Porta Pompæ. Peace to you; peace to all.”

He bowed and departed, careless of the shout of derision with which they pursued him out of the door.

In the night the story of the prodigious wager flew along the streets and over the city; and Ben-Hur, lying with his four, was told of it, and also that Messala’s whole fortune was on the hazard.

And he slept never so soundly.

VIII

The Circus at Antioch



THE Circus at Antioch stood on the south bank of the river nearly opposite the island, differing in no respect from the plan of such buildings in general.

In the purest sense, the games were a gift to the public; consequently, everybody was free to attend; and, vast as the holding capacity of the structure was, so fearful were the people, on this occasion, lest there should not be room for them, that, early in the day before the opening of the exhibition, they took up all the vacant spaces in the vicinity, where their temporary shelter suggested an army in waiting.

At midnight the entrances were thrown wide, and the rabble, surging in, occupied the

The Circus at Antioch

quarters assigned to them, from which nothing less than an earthquake or an army with spears could have dislodged them. They dozed the night away on the benches, and breakfasted there; and there the close of the exercises found them, patient and sight-hungry as in the beginning.

The better people, their seats secured, began moving toward the Circus about the first hour of the morning, the noble and very rich among them distinguished by litters and retinues of liveried servants.

By the second hour, the efflux from the city was a stream unbroken and innumerable.

Exactly as the gnomon of the official dial up in the citadel pointed the second hour half gone, the legion, in full panoply, and with all its standards on exhibit, descended from Mount Sulpius; and when the rear of the last cohort disappeared in the bridge, Antioch was literally abandoned—not that the Circus could hold the multitude, but that the multitude was gone out to it, nevertheless.

A great concourse on the river shore wit-

The Chariot-race

nessed the consul come over from the island in a barge of state. As the great man landed, and was received by the legion, the martial show for one brief moment transcended the attraction of the Circus.

At the third hour, the audience, if such it may be termed, was assembled; at last, a flourish of trumpets called for silence, and instantly the gaze of over a hundred thousand persons was directed toward a pile forming the eastern section of the building.

There was a basement first, broken in the middle by a broad arched passage, called the Porta Pompæ, over which, on an elevated tribunal magnificently decorated with insignia and legionary standards, the consul sat in the place of honor. On both sides of the passage the basement was divided into stalls termed *carceres*, each protected in front by massive gates swung to statuesque pilasters. Over the stalls next was a cornice crowned by a low balustrade; back of which the seats arose in theatre arrangements, all occupied by a throng of dignitaries superbly attired. The pile extended the width of the

The Circus at Antioch

Circus, and was flanked on both sides by towers which, besides helping the architects give grace to their work, served the *velaria*, or purple awnings, stretched between them so as to throw the whole quarter in a shade that became exceedingly grateful as the day advanced.

This structure, it is now thought, can be made useful in helping the reader to a sufficient understanding of the arrangement of the rest of the interior of the Circus. He has only to fancy himself seated on the tribunal with the consul, facing to the west, where everything is under his eye.

On the right and left, if he will look, he will see the main entrances, very ample, and guarded by gates hinged to the towers.

Directly below him is the arena—a level plane of considerable extent, covered with fine white sand. There all the trials will take place except the running.

Looking across this sanded arena westwardly still, there is a pedestal of marble supporting three low conical pillars of gray stone, much carven. Many an eye will hunt

The Chariot-race

for those pillars before the day is done, for they are the first goal, and mark the beginning and end of the race-course. Behind the pedestal, leaving a passageway and space for an altar, commences a wall ten or twelve feet in breadth and five or six in height, extending thence exactly two hundred yards, or one Olympic stadium. At the farther, or westward, extremity of the wall there is another pedestal, surmounted with pillars which mark the second goal.

The racers will enter the course on the right of the first goal, and keep the wall all the time to their left. The beginning and ending points of the contest lie, consequently, directly in front of the consul across the arena; and for that reason his seat was admittedly the most desirable in the Circus.

Now if the reader, who is still supposed to be seated on the consular tribunal over the Porta Pompæ, will look up from the ground arrangement of the interior, the first point to attract his notice will be the marking of the outer boundary-line of the course

The Circus at Antioch

—that is, a plain-faced, solid wall, fifteen or twenty feet in height, with a balustrade on its cope, like that over the *carceres*, or stalls, in the east. This balcony, if followed round the course, will be found broken in three places to allow passages of exit and entrance, two in the north and one in the west; the latter very ornate, and called the Gate of Triumph, because, when all is over, the victors will pass out that way, crowned, and with triumphal escort and ceremonies.

At the west end the balcony encloses the course in the form of a half-circle, and is made to uphold two great galleries.

Directly behind the balustrade on the coping of the balcony is the first seat, from which ascend the succeeding benches, each higher than the one in front of it; giving to view a spectacle of surpassing interest—the spectacle of a vast space ruddy and glistening with human faces, and rich with varicolored costumes.

The commonalty occupy quarters over in the west, beginning at the point of termination of an awning, stretched, it would seem,

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for the accommodation of the better classes exclusively.

Having thus the whole interior of the Circus under view at the moment of the sounding of the trumpets, let the reader next imagine the multitude seated and sunk to sudden silence, and motionless in its intensity of interest.

Out of the Porta Pompæ over in the east rises a sound mixed of voices and instruments harmonized. Presently, forth issues the chorus of the procession with which the celebration begins; the editor and civic authorities of the city, givers of the games, follow in robes and garlands; then the gods, some on platforms borne by men, others in great four-wheel carriages gorgeously decorated; next them, again, the contestants of the day, each in costume exactly as he will run, wrestle, leap, box, or drive.

Slowly crossing the arena, the procession proceeds to make circuit of the course. The display is beautiful and imposing. Approval runs before it in a shout, as the water rises and swells in front of a boat in motion. If

The Circus at Antioch

the dumb, figured gods make no sign of appreciation of the welcome, the editor and his associates are not so backward.

The reception of the athletes is even more demonstrative, for there is not a man in the assemblage who has not something in wager upon them, though but a mite or farthing. And it is noticeable, as the classes move by, that the favorites among them are speedily singled out: either their names are loudest in the uproar, or they are more profusely showered with wreaths and garlands tossed to them from the balcony.

If there is a question as to the popularity with the public of the several games, it is now put to rest. To the splendor of the chariots and the superexcellent beauty of the horses, the charioteers add the personality necessary to perfect the charm of their display. Their tunics, short, sleeveless, and of the finest woollen texture, are of the assigned colors. A horseman accompanies each one of them except Ben-Hur, who, for some reason—possibly distrust—has chosen to go alone; so, too, they are all helmeted but him.

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As they approach, the spectators stand upon the benches, and there is a sensible deepening of the clamor, in which a sharp listener may detect the shrill piping of women and children; at the same time, the things roseate flying from the balcony thicken into a storm, and, striking the men, drop into the chariot-beds, which are threatened with filling to the tops. Even the horses have a share in the ovation; nor may it be said they are less conscious than their masters of the honors they receive.

Very soon, as with the other contestants, it is made apparent that some of the drivers are more in favor than others; and then the discovery follows that nearly every individual on the benches, women and children as well as men, wears a color, most frequently a ribbon upon the breast or in the hair: now it is green, now yellow, now blue; but, searching the great body carefully, it is manifest that there is a preponderance of white, and scarlet and gold.

In a modern assemblage called together as this one is, particularly where there are

The Circus at Antioch

sums at hazard upon the race, a preference would be decided by the qualities or performance of the horses; here, however, nationality was the rule. If the Byzantine and Sidonian found small support, it was because their cities were scarcely represented on the benches. On their side, the Greeks, though very numerous, were divided between the Corinthian and the Athenian, leaving but a scant showing of green and yellow. Messala's scarlet and gold would have been but little better had not the citizens of Antioch, proverbially a race of courtiers, joined the Romans by adopting the color of their favorite. There were left then the country people, or Syrians, the Jews, and the Arabs; and they, from faith in the blood of the sheik's four, blent largely with hate of the Romans, whom they desired, above all things, to see beaten and humbled, mounted the white, making the most noisy, and probably the most numerous, faction of all.

As the charioteers move on in the circuit, the excitement increases; at the second goal, where, especially in the galleries, the white

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is the ruling color, the people exhaust their flowers and rive the air with screams.

"Messala! Messala!"

"Ben-Hur! Ben-Hur!"

Such are the cries.

Upon the passage of the procession, the factionists take their seats and resume conversation.

"Ah, by Bacchus! was he not handsome?" exclaims a woman, whose Romanism is betrayed by the colors flying in her hair.

"And how splendid his chariot!" replies a neighbor, of the same proclivities. "It is all ivory and gold. Jupiter grant he wins!"

The notes on the bench behind them were entirely different.

"A hundred shekels on the Jew!"

The voice is high and shrill.

"Nay, be thou not rash," whispers a moderating friend to the speaker. "The children of Jacob are not much given to Gentile sports, which are too often accursed in the sight of the Lord."

"True, but saw you ever one more cool and assured? And what an arm he has!"

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"And what horses!" says a third.

"And for that," a fourth one adds, "they say he has all the tricks of the Romans."

A woman completes the eulogium:

"Yes, and he is even handsomer than the Roman."

Thus encouraged, the enthusiast shrieks again: "A hundred shekels on the Jew!"

"Thou fool!" answers an Antiochian, from a bench well forward on the balcony.

"Knowest thou not there are fifty talents laid against him, six to one, on Messala? Put up thy shekels, lest Abraham rise and smite thee."

"Ha, ha! thou ass of Antioch! Cease thy bray. Knowest thou not it was Messala betting on himself?"

Such the reply.


And so ran the controversy, not always good-natured.

When at length the march was ended and the Porta Pompæ received back the procession, Ben-Hur knew he had his prayer.

The eyes of the East were upon his contest with Messala.

IX

The Race is On

BOUT three o'clock, speaking in modern style, the programme was concluded except the chariot-race. The editor, wisely considerate of the comfort of the people, chose that time for a recess. At once the *vomitoria* were thrown open, and all who could hastened to the portico outside where the restaurateurs had their quarters. Those who remained yawned, talked, gossiped, consulted their tablets, and, all distinctions else forgotten, merged into but two classes—the winners, who were happy, and the losers, who were grum and captious.

Now, however, a third class of spectators, composed of citizens who desired only to witness the chariot-race, availed themselves

The Race is On

of the recess to come in and take their reserved seats; by so doing they thought to attract the least attention and give the least offence. Among these were Simonides and his party, whose places were in the vicinity of the main entrance on the north side, opposite the consul.

As the four stout servants carried the merchant in his chair up the aisle, curiosity was much excited. Presently some one called his name. Those about caught it and passed it on along the benches to the west; and there was hurried climbing on seats to get sight of the man about whom common report had coined and put in circulation a romance so mixed of good fortune and bad that the like had never been known or heard of before.

Ilderim was also recognized and warmly greeted; but nobody knew his friend Balthasar, the Egyptian, or the two women who followed him closely veiled.

The people made way for the party respectfully, and the ushers seated them in easy speaking distance of each other down

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by the balustrade overlooking the arena. In providence of comfort, they sat upon cushions and had stools for foot-rests.

The women were Iras, daughter of Balthasar, and Esther, daughter of Simonides.

Upon being seated, the latter cast a frightened look over the Circus, and drew the veil closer about her face; while the Egyptian, letting her veil fall upon her shoulders, gave herself to view, and gazed at the scene with the seeming unconsciousness of being stared at, which, in a woman, is usually the result of long social habitude.

The new-comers generally were yet making their first examination of the great spectacle, beginning with the consul and his attendants, when some workmen ran in and commenced to stretch a chalked rope across the arena from balcony to balcony in front of the pillars of the first goal.

About the same time, also, six men came in through the Porta Pompæ and took post, one in front of each occupied stall; whereat there was a prolonged hum of voices in every quarter.

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"See, see! The green goes to number four on the right; the Athenian is there."

"And Messala—yes, he is in number two."

"The Corinthian—"

"Watch the white! See, he crosses over, he stops; number one it is—number one on the left."

"No, the black stops there, and the white at number two."

"So it is."

These gate-keepers, it should be understood, were dressed in tunics colored like those of the competing charioteers; so, when they took their stations, everybody knew the particular stall in which his favorite was that moment waiting.

"Did you ever see Messala?" the Egyptian asked Esther.

The Jewess shuddered as she answered no. If not her father's enemy, the Roman was Ben-Hur's.

"He is beautiful as Apollo."

As Iras spoke, her large eyes brightened and she shook her jewelled fan. Esther looked at her with the thought, "Is he, then,

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so much handsomer than Ben-Hur?" Next moment she heard Ilderim say to her father: "Yes, his stall is number two on the left of the Porta Pompæ"; and, thinking it was of Ben-Hur he spoke, her eyes turned that way. Taking but the briefest glance at the wattled face of the gate, she drew the veil close and muttered a little prayer.

Presently Sanballat came to the party.

"I am just from the stalls, O sheik," he said, bowing gravely to Ilderim, who began combing his beard, while his eyes glittered with eager inquiry. "The horses are in perfect condition."

Ilderim replied, simply: "If they are beaten, I pray it be by some other than Messala."

Turning then to Simonides, Sanballat drew out a tablet, saying: "I bring you also something of interest. I reported, you will remember, the wager concluded with Messala last night, and stated that I left another which, if taken, was to be delivered to me in writing to-day before the race began. Here it is."

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Simonides took the tablet and read the memorandum carefully.

"Yes," he said, "their emissary came to ask me if you had so much money with me. Keep the tablet close. If you lose, you know where to come; if you win"—his face knit hard—"if you win—ah, friend, see to it! See the signers escape not; hold them to the last shekel. That is what they would with us."

"Trust me," replied the purveyor.

"Will you not sit with us?" asked Simonides.

"You are very good," the other returned; "but if I leave the consul, young Rome yonder will boil over. Peace to you; peace to all."

At length the recess came to an end.

The trumpeters blew a call, at which the absentees rushed back to their places. At the same time, some attendants appeared in the arena, and, climbing upon the division wall, went to an entablature near the second goal at the west end, and placed upon it seven wooden balls; then returning to the first goal,

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upon an entablature there they set up seven other pieces of wood hewn to represent dolphins.

"What shall they do with the balls and fishes, O sheik?" asked Balthasar.

"Hast thou never attended a race?"

"Never before; and hardly know I why I am here."

"Well, they are to keep the count. At the end of each round run thou shalt see one ball and one fish taken down."

The preparations were now complete, and presently a trumpeter in gaudy uniform arose by the editor, ready to blow the signal of commencement promptly at his order. Straightway the stir of the people and the hum of their conversation died away. Every face near by, and every face in the lessening perspective, turned to the east, as all eyes settled upon the gates of the six stalls which shut in the competitors.

The unusual flush upon his face gave proof that even Simonides had caught the universal excitement. Ilderim pulled his beard fast and furious.

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"Look now for the Roman," said the fair Egyptian to Esther, who did not hear her, for, with close-drawn veil and beating heart, she sat watching for Ben-Hur.

The structure containing the stalls, it should be observed, was in form of the segment of a circle, retired on the right so that its central point was projected forward, and midway the course, on the starting side of the first goal. Every stall, consequently, was equally distant from the starting-line or chalked rope above mentioned.

The trumpet sounded short and sharp; whereupon the starters, one for each chariot, leaped down from behind the pillars of the goal, ready to give assistance if any of the four proved unmanageable.

Again the trumpet blew, and simultaneously the gate-keepers threw the stalls open.

First appeared the mounted attendants of the charioteers, five in all, Ben-Hur having rejected the service. The chalked line was lowered to let them pass, then raised again. They were beautifully mounted, yet scarcely observed as they rode forward; for all the

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time the trampling of eager horses, and the voices of drivers scarcely less eager, were heard behind in the stalls, so that one might not look away an instant from the gaping doors.

The chalked line up again, the gate-keepers called their men; instantly the ushers on the balcony waved their hands, and shouted with all their strength: "Down! down!"

As well have whistled to stay a storm.

Forth from each stall, like missiles in a volley from so many great guns, rushed the six fours; and up the vast assemblage arose, electrified and irrepressible, and, leaping upon the benches, filled the Circus and the air above it with yells and screams. This was the time for which they had so patiently waited!—this the moment of supreme interest treasured up in talk and dreams since the proclamation of the games!

"He is come—there—look!" cried Iras, pointing to Messala.

"I see him," answered Esther, looking at Ben-Hur.

The veil was withdrawn. For an instant

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the little Jewess was brave. An idea of the joy there is in doing an heroic deed under the eyes of a multitude came to her, and she understood ever after how, at such times, the souls of men, in the frenzy of performance, laugh at death or forget it utterly.

The competitors were now under view from nearly every part of the Circus, yet the race was not begun; they had first to make the chalked line successfully.

The line was stretched for the purpose of equalizing the start. If it were dashed upon, discomfiture of man and horses might be apprehended; on the other hand, to approach it timidly was to incur the hazard of being thrown behind in the beginning of the race; and that was certain forfeit of the great advantage always striven for—the position next the division wall on the inner line of the course.

This trial, its perils and consequences, the spectators knew thoroughly; and if the opinion of old Nestor, uttered what time he handed the reins to his son, were true—

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“It is not strength, but art, obtained the prize,
And to be swift is less than to be wise”—

all on the benches might well look for warning of the winner to be now given, justifying the interest with which they breathlessly watched for the result.

The arena swam in a dazzle of light; yet each driver looked first thing for the rope, then for the coveted inner line. So, all six aiming at the same point and speeding furiously, a collision seemed inevitable; nor that merely. What if the editor, at the last moment, dissatisfied with the start, should withhold the signal to drop the rope? Or if he should not give it in time?

The crossing was about two hundred and fifty feet in width. Quick the eye, steady the hand, unerring the judgment required. If now one look away! or his mind wander! or a rein slip! And what attraction in the *ensemble* of the thousands over the spreading balcony! Calculating upon the natural impulse to give one glance—just one—in sooth of curiosity or vanity, malice might

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be there with an artifice; while friendship and love, did they serve the same result, might be as deadly as malice.

The divine last touch in perfecting the beautiful is animation. Can we accept the saying, then, these latter days, so tame in pastime and dull in sports, have scarcely anything to compare to the spectacle offered by the six contestants? Let the reader try to fancy it; let him first look down upon the arena, and see it glistening in its frame of dull-gray granite walls; let him, then, in this perfect field, see the chariots, light of wheel, very graceful, and ornate as paint and burnishing can make them—Messala's rich with ivory and gold; let him see the drivers, erect and statuesque, undisturbed by the motion of the cars, their limbs naked, and fresh and ruddy with the healthful polish of the baths—in their right hands goads, suggestive of torture dreadful to the thought—in their left hands, held in careful separation, and high, that they may not interfere with view of the steeds, the reins passing taut from the fore ends of the carriage-poles;

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let him see the fours, chosen for beauty as well as speed; let him see them in magnificent action, their masters not more conscious of the situation and all that is asked and hoped from them—their heads tossing, nostrils in play, now distent, now contracted — limbs too dainty for the sand which they touch but to spurn—limbs slender, yet with impact crushing as hammers — every muscle of the rounded bodies instinct with glorious life, swelling, diminishing, justifying the world in taking from them its ultimate measure of force; finally, along with chariots, drivers, horses, let the reader see the accompanying shadows fly; and, with such distinctness as the picture comes, he may share the satisfaction and deeper pleasure of those to whom it was a thrilling fact, not a feeble fancy. Every age has its plenty of sorrows; Heaven help where there are no pleasures!

The competitors having started each on the shortest line for the position next the wall, yielding would be like giving up the race; and who dared yield? It is not in common nature to change a purpose in

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mid-career; and the cries of encouragement from the balcony were indistinguishable and indescribable: a roar which had the same effect upon all the drivers.

The fours neared the rope together. Then the trumpeter by the editor's side blew a signal vigorously. Twenty feet away it was not heard. Seeing the action, however, the judges dropped the rope, and not an instant too soon, for the hoof of one of Messala's horses struck it as it fell. Nothing daunted, the Roman shook out his long lash, loosed the reins, leaned forward, and, with a triumphant shout, took the wall.

"Jove with us! Jove with us!" yelled all the Roman faction, in a frenzy of delight.

As Messala turned in, the bronze lion's head at the end of his axle caught the foreleg of the Athenian's right-hand trace-mate, flinging the brute over against its yoke-fellow. Both staggered, struggled, and lost their headway. The ushers had their will at least in part. The thousands held their breath with horror; only up where the consul sat was there shouting.

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"Jove with us!" screamed Drusus, frantically.

"He wins! Jove with us!" answered his associates, seeing Messala speed on.

Tablet in hand, Sanballat turned to them; a crash from the course below stopped his speech, and he could not but look that way.

Messala having passed, the Corinthian was the only contestant on the Athenian's right, and to that side the latter tried to turn his broken four; and then, as ill-fortune would have it, the wheel of the Byzantine, who was next on the left, struck the tail-piece of his chariot, knocking his feet from under him. There was a crash, a scream of rage and fear, and the unfortunate Cleanthes fell under the hoofs of his own steeds: a terrible sight, against which Esther covered her eyes.

On swept the Corinthian, on the Byzantine, on the Sidonian.

Sanballat looked for Ben-Hur, and turned again to Drusus and his coterie.

"A hundred sestertii on the Jew!" he cried.

"Taken!" answered Drusus.



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"Another hundred on the Jew!" shouted Sanballat.


Nobody appeared to hear him. He called again; the situation below was too absorbing, and they were too busy shouting: "Messala! Messala! Jove with us!"

When the Jewess ventured to look again, a party of workmen were removing the horses and broken car; another party were taking off the man himself; and every bench upon which there was a Greek was vocal with execrations and prayers for vengeance. Suddenly she dropped her hands; Ben - Hur, unhurt, was to the front, coursing freely forward along with the Roman! Behind them, in a group, followed the Sidonian, the Corinthian, and the Byzantine.

The race was on; the souls of the racers were in it; over them bent the myriads.

X

The Race is Won

HEN the dash for position began, Ben-Hur, as we have seen, was on the extreme left of the six. For a moment, like the others, he was half blinded by the light in the arena; yet he managed to catch sight of his antagonists and divine their purpose. At Messala, who was more than an antagonist to him, he gave one searching look. The air of passionless hauteur characteristic of the fine patrician face was there as of old, and so was the Italian beauty, which the helmet rather increased; but more—it may have been a jealous fancy, or the effect of the brassy shadow in which the features were at the moment cast, still the Israelite thought he saw the soul of the man as through a glass,

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darkly: cruel, cunning, desperate; not so excited as determined—a soul in a tension of watchfulness and fierce resolve.

In a time not longer than was required to turn to his four again, Ben-Hur felt his own resolution harden to a like temper. At whatever cost, at all hazards, he would humble this enemy! Prize, friends, wagers, honor—everything that can be thought of as a possible interest in the race was lost in the one deliberate purpose. Regard for life even should not hold him back. Yet there was no passion, on his part; no blinding rush of heated blood from heart to brain, and back again; no impulse to fling himself upon Fortune: he did not believe in Fortune; far otherwise. He had his plan, and, confiding in himself, he settled to the task never more observant, never more capable. The air about him seemed aglow with a renewed and perfect transparency.

When not half-way across the arena, he saw that Messala's rush would, if there was no collision, and the rope fell, give him the wall; that the rope would fall, he ceased

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as soon to doubt; and, further, it came to him, a sudden, flash-like insight, that Messala knew it was to be let drop at the last moment (prearrangement with the editor could safely reach that point in the contest); and it suggested, what more Roman-like than for the official to lend himself to a countryman who, besides being so popular, had also so much at stake? There could be no other accounting for the confidence with which Messala pushed his four forward the instant his competitors were prudentially checking their fours in front of the obstruction—no other except madness.

It is one thing to see a necessity and another to act upon it. Ben-Hur yielded the wall for the time.

The rope fell, and all the fours but his sprang into the course under urgency of voice and lash. He drew head to the right, and, with all the speed of his Arabs, darted across the trails of his opponents, the angle of movement being such as to lose the least time and gain the greatest possible advance. So, while the spectators were shivering at the

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Athenian's mishap, and the Sidonian, Byzantine, and Corinthian were striving, with such skill as they possessed, to avoid involvement in the ruin, Ben-Hur swept around and took the course neck and neck with Messala, though on the outside. The marvellous skill shown in making the change thus from the extreme left across to the right without appreciable loss did not fail the sharp eyes upon the benches: the Circus seemed to rock and rock again with prolonged applause. Then Esther clasped her hands in glad surprise; then Sanballat, smiling, offered his hundred sestertii a second time without a taker; and then the Romans began to doubt, thinking Messala might have found an equal, if not a master, and that in an Israelite!

And now, racing together side by side, a narrow interval between them, the two neared the second goal.

The pedestal of the three pillars there, viewed from the west, was a stone wall in the form of a half-circle, around which the course and opposite balcony were bent in exact parallelism. Making this turn was con-

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sidered in all respects the most telling test of a charioteer; it was, in fact, the very feat in which Orestes failed. As an involuntary admission of interest on the part of the spectators, a hush fell over all the Circus, so that for the first time in the race the rattle and clang of the cars plunging after the tugging steeds were distinctly heard. Then, it would seem, Messala observed Ben-Hur, and recognized him; and at once the audacity of the man flamed out in an astonishing manner.

“Down Eros, up Mars!” he shouted, whirling his lash with practised hand. “Down Eros, up Mars!” he repeated, and caught the well-doing Arabs of Ben-Hur a cut the like of which they had never known.

The blow was seen in every quarter, and the amazement was universal. The silence deepened; up on the benches behind the consul the boldest held his breath, waiting for the outcome. Only a moment thus: then, involuntarily, down from the balcony, as thunder falls, burst the indignant cry of the people.

The four sprang forward affrighted. No

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hand had ever been laid upon them except in love; they had been nurtured ever so tenderly; and as they grew, their confidence in man became a lesson to men beautiful to see. What should such dainty natures do under such indignity but leap as from death?

Forward they sprang as with one impulse, and forward leaped the car. Past question, every experience is serviceable to us. Where got Ben-Hur the large hand and mighty grip which helped him now so well? Where but from the oar with which so long he fought the sea? And what was this spring of the floor under his feet to the dizzy, eccentric lurch with which in the old time the trembling ship yielded to the beat of staggering billows, drunk with their power? So he kept his place, and gave the four free rein, and called to them in soothing voice, trying merely to guide them round the dangerous turn; and before the fever of the people began to abate he had back the mastery. Nor that only: on approaching the first goal, he was again side by side with Messala, bearing with him the sympathy and admiration of

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every one not a Roman. So clearly was the feeling shown, so vigorous its manifestation, that Messala, with all his boldness, felt it unsafe to trifle further.

As the cars whirled round the goal, Esther caught sight of Ben-Hur's face—a little pale, a little higher raised, otherwise calm, even placid.

Immediately a man climbed on the entablature at the west end of the division wall, and took down one of the conical wooden balls. A dolphin on the east entablature was taken down at the same time.

In like manner, the second ball and second dolphin disappeared.

And then the third ball and third dolphin.

Three rounds concluded: still Messala held the inside position; still Ben-Hur moved with him side by side; still the other competitors followed as before. The contest began to have the appearance of one of the double races which became so popular in Rome during the later Cæsarean period—Messala and Ben-Hur in the first, the Corinthian, Sidonian, and Byzantine in the second.

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Meantime the ushers succeeded in returning the multitude to their seats, though the clamor continued to run the rounds, keeping, as it were, even pace with the rivals in the course below.

In the fifth round the Sidonian succeeded in getting a place outside Ben-Hur, but lost it directly.

The sixth round was entered upon without change of relative position.

Gradually the speed had been quickened—gradually the blood of the competitors warmed with the work. Men and beasts seemed to know alike that the final crisis was near, bringing the time for the winner to assert himself.

The interest which from the beginning had centred chiefly in the struggle between the Roman and the Jew, with an intense and general sympathy for the latter, was fast changing to anxiety on his account. On all the benches the spectators bent forward motionless, except as their faces turned following the contestants. Ilderim quitted combing his beard, and Esther forgot her fears.

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"A hundred sestertii on the Jew!" cried Sanballat to the Romans under the consul's awning.

There was no reply.

"A talent—or five talents, or ten; choose ye!"

He shook his tablets at them defiantly.

"I will take thy sestertii," answered a Roman youth, preparing to write.

"Do not so," interposed a friend.

"Why?"

"Messala hath reached his utmost speed. See him lean over his chariot-rim, the reins loose as flying ribbons. Look then at the Jew."

The first one looked.

"By Hercules!" he replied, his countenance falling. "The dog throws all his weight on the bits. I see, I see! If the gods help not our friend, he will be run away with by the Israelite. No, not yet. Look! Jove with us, Jove with us!"

The cry, swelled by every Latin tongue, shook the *velaria* over the consul's head.

If it were true that Messala had attained

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his utmost speed, the effort was with effect; slowly but certainly he was beginning to forge ahead. His horses were running with their heads low down; from the balcony their bodies appeared actually to skim the earth; their nostrils showed blood-red in expansion; their eyes seemed straining in their sockets. Certainly the good steeds were doing their best! How long could they keep the pace? It was but the commencement of the sixth round. On they dashed. As they neared the second goal, Ben-Hur turned in behind the Roman's car.

The joy of the Messala faction reached its bound: they screamed and howled, and tossed their colors; and Sanballat filled his tablets with wagers of their tendering.

Malluch, in the lower gallery over the Gate of Triumph, found it hard to keep his cheer. He had cherished the vague hint dropped to him by Ben-Hur of something to happen in the turning of the western pillars. It was the fifth round, yet the something had not come; and he had said to himself, the sixth will bring it; but, lo! Ben-Hur was hardly

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holding a place at the tail of his enemy's car.

Over in the east end, Simonides' party held their peace. The merchant's head was bent low. Ilderim tugged at his beard, and dropped his brows till there was nothing of his eyes but an occasional sparkle of light. Esther scarcely breathed. Iras alone appeared glad.

Along the home-stretch — sixth round — Messala leading, next him Ben-Hur, and so close it was the old story:

“First flew Eumelus on Pheretian steeds;
With those of Tros bold Diomed succeeds;
Close on Eumelus' back they puff the wind,
And seem just mounting on his car behind;
Full on his neck he feels the sultry breeze,
And, hovering o'er, their stretching shadow sees.”

Thus to the first goal, and round it. Messala, fearful of losing his place, hugged the stony wall with perilous clasp; a foot to the left, and he had been dashed to pieces; yet, when the turn was finished, no man, looking at the wheel-tracks of the two cars,

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could have said, here went Messala, there the Jew. They left but one trace behind them.

As they whirled by, Esther saw Ben-Hur's face again, and it was whiter than before.

Simonides, shrewder than Esther, said to Ilderim, the moment the rivals turned into the course: "I am no judge, good sheik, if Ben-Hur be not about to execute some design. His face hath that look."

To which Ilderim answered: "Saw you how clean they were and fresh? By the splendor of God, friend, they have not been running! But now watch!"

One ball and one dolphin remained on the entablatures; and all the people drew a long breath, for the beginning of the end was at hand.

First, the Sidonian gave the scourge to his four, and, smarting with fear and pain, they dashed desperately forward, promising for a brief time to go to the front. The effort ended in promise. Next, the Byzantine and Corinthian each made the trial with like result, after which they were practically out

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of the race. Thereupon, with a readiness perfectly explicable, all the factions except the Romans joined hope in Ben-Hur, and openly indulged their feeling.

"Ben-Hur! Ben-Hur!" they shouted, and the blent voices of the many rolled overwhelmingly against the consular stand.

From the benches above him as he passed, the favor descended in fierce injunctions.

"Speed thee, Jew!"

"Take the wall now!"

"On! loose the Arabs! Give them rein and scourge!"

"Let him not have the turn on thee again. Now or never!"

Over the balustrade they stooped low, stretching their hands imploringly to him.

Either he did not hear, or could not do better, for half-way round the course and he was still following; at the second goal even still no change!

And now, to make the turn, Messala began to draw in his left-hand steeds, an act which necessarily slackened their speed. His spirit was high; more than one altar was

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richer of his vows; the Roman genius was still president. On the three pillars only six hundred feet away were fame, increase of fortune, promotions, and a triumph ineffably sweetened by hate, all in store for him! That moment Malluch, in the gallery, saw Ben-Hur lean forward over his Arabs, and give them the reins. Out flew the manyfolded lash in his hand; over the backs of the startled steeds it writhed and hissed, and hissed and writhed again and again; and though it fell not, there were both sting and menace in its quick report; and as the man passed thus from quiet to resistless action, his face suffused, his eyes gleaming, along the reins he seemed to flash his will; and instantly not one, but the four as one, answered with a leap that landed them alongside the Roman's car. Messala, on the perilous edge of the goal, heard, but dared not look to see what the awakening portended. From the people he received no sign. Above the noises of the race there was but one voice, and that was Ben-Hur's. In the old Aramaic, as the sheik himself, he called to the Arabs:

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“On, Atair! On, Rigel! What, Antares! dost thou linger now? Good horse—oho, Aldebaran! I hear them singing in the tents. I hear the children singing and the women—singing of the stars, of Atair, Antares, Rigel, Aldebaran, victory!—and the song will never end. Well done! Home to-morrow, under the black tent—home! On, Antares! The tribe is waiting for us, and the master is waiting! 'Tis done! 'tis done! Ha, ha! We have overthrown the proud. The hand that smote us is in the dust. Ours the glory! Ha, ha!—steady! The work is done—soho! Rest!”

There had never been anything of the kind more simple; seldom anything so instantaneous.

At the moment chosen for the dash, Mes-sala was moving in a circle round the goal. To pass him, Ben-Hur had to cross the track, and good strategy required the movement to be in a forward direction; that is, on a like circle limited to the least possible increase. The thousands on the benches understood it all: they saw the signal given—

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the magnificent response; the four close outside Messala's outer wheel, Ben-Hur's inner wheel behind the other's car—all this they saw. Then they heard a crash loud enough to send a thrill through the Circus, and, quicker than thought, out over the course a spray of shining white-and-yellow flinders flew. Down on its right side toppled the bed of the Roman's chariot. There was a rebound as of the axle hitting the hard earth; another and another; then the car went to pieces; and Messala, entangled in the reins, pitched forward headlong.

To increase the horror of the sight by making death certain, the Sidonian, who had the wall next behind, could not stop or turn out. Into the wreck full speed he drove; then over the Roman, and into the latter's four, all mad with fear. Presently, out of the turmoil, the fighting of horses, the resound of blows, the murky cloud of dust and sand, he crawled, in time to see the Corinthian and Byzantine go on down the course after Ben-Hur, who had not been an instant delayed.

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The people arose, and leaped upon the benches, and shouted and screamed. Those who looked that way caught glimpses of Messala, now under the trampling of the fours, now under the abandoned cars. He was still; they thought him dead; but far the greater number followed Ben-Hur in his career. They had not seen the cunning touch of the reins by which, turning a little to the left, he caught Messala's wheel with the iron-shod point of his axle, and crushed it; but they had seen the transformation of the man, and themselves felt the heat and glow of his spirit, the heroic resolution, the maddening energy of action with which, by look, word, and gesture, he so suddenly inspired his Arabs. And such running! It was rather the long leaping of lions in harness; but for the lumbering chariot, it seemed the four were flying. When the Byzantine and Corinthian were half-way down the course, Ben-Hur turned the first goal.

And the race was won!

The consul arose; the people shouted them-

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selves hoarse; the editor came down from his seat, and crowned the victors.

Ben-Hur looked up and beheld Simonides and his party on the balcony. They waved their hands to him. Esther kept her seat; but Iras arose, and gave him a smile and a wave of her fan—favors not the less intoxicating to him because we know, O reader, they would have fallen to Messala had he been the victor.

The procession was then formed, and, midst the shouting of the multitude which had had its will, passed out of the Gate of Triumph.

And the day was over.

THE END

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